

Redstone and iron

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Redstone and iron

by Anonymous

Summary

The Antarctic Empire has conquered the world once before. Their next target is the moon. And, well - New York certainly isn't the moon, and The Avengers never take kindly to conquerors.

(Or: Phil and Techno hop through a stronghold portal and find themselves on a new version of earth. What is a "shower?")

(Or: Earth's mightiest heroes adopt two new idiots.)

Notes

My marvel hyperfixation lasted three full years and I have never kinned characters harder since I kinned marvel characters, but y'all didn't hear that from me. This was bound to come back to punch me at some point apparently! (Sobs)

Hope you enjoy :D

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Soft golden light pours from a twirling circle of stardust. Snow drifts through the air, edges glinting in the otherworldly twist of colors. They stand on a cliff of ice and centuries, frozen together in time, just waiting to be uncovered.

There's so much left within the stronghold to be found. Technoblade and Phil stand hovering above a portal to the skies, hand in hand, and they wonder. What have they found, and how much deeper must they go? What awaits them once they've taken their plunge, found their way up to the stars and *further*?

They've made it this far. They've made it past worlds against them and past the very gates of hell and they're *still standing*, hand in hand before the stars.

"The world," murmurs Technoblade, turning to look at Phil, nodding with the weight of both of their lives within his expression.

"The world," replies Phil, a pride-filled grin stretched across his teeth. He squeezes Techno's hand encouragingly, his palms warm and steady, the two of them held together as if their souls sit upon their wrists, fluttering just behind their individual pulses, beating as one.

In the end, neither will remember who took the first step. Perhaps it was in tandem, as they reached the lip of the portal, boots steady on the thin eye-coated rim beneath them. Perhaps one took initiative and the other followed, their hesitation eliminated as their choice became clear.

The rulers of the Antarctic Empire disappear in a flash of blue light.

—

It starts with a little blip on a computer. As it always does, it starts with a soft red light and an emergent beeping, calling for attention. And then, as small red lights and alerts on computer screens always do, it *spirals*.

It's been a long time since any sort of energy from the tesseract bothered New York. Or — to that matter — just about anywhere on earth. There've been blips of cosmic energy from people like Strange or even *Maximoff* when things get real complicated. None of it is ever enough to show up on SHIELD's hyper-specific radar, though.

So when Fury walks up to a random, unlabeled red light one day and finds that an energy signature larger than what had come from Loki has suddenly popped up in the middle of New York, he knows his day is going to be longer than usual.

There's no intel. No news, no deep-web forum posts to pick around in. There's only a beeping red light and an unidentified portal building somewhere around the middle of god-damned midtown Manhattan, and isn't that the worst and best place for a portal to be

growing? You've got the Avengers, a smattering of idiot vigilantes, and a little over a million civilians just *waiting* to get involved in an attack.

So, he does what any other rational asshole would do. He calls up the Avengers and he tells them that if anyone so much as takes a break for coffee before this new threat is dealt with, he will know and he has *guns*. The Avengers, in typical Avengers fashion, moan and groan and then put on their big-boy pants and get ready to go.

—

It takes a while to find it.

It's not like any of them — (to Tony's knowledge) — have access to any sort of magical-portal-tracker. That's another thing. It isn't magic, no matter how much Thor likes to wave his hands and refer to it as such. Magic is just science that people have been too lazy to diagnose as such in the past, and he *always* endeavors to diagnose.

But, in the end, nothing that comes out of the ass-end of a massive glowing portal wants to stay hidden for long, and The Avengers find their target.

It's in a dingy black alleyway, which is decently uncharacteristic for supervillain entrances. It takes a long while of scanning Manhattan, talking to random civilians, and just straight-up hacking into security cameras before they find it. Jarvis does a good chunk of the work — looking through everywhere with anything that even smells like technology to find their portal.

Well — it isn't *their* portal. That's obvious. In fact, when Tony first faces it, he's not sure how to confirm that it isn't some sort of terrifying modern public art project.

A long, spiraling circle of eyes dances across the bricks in the alley, twisting like vines across a wall. They stare deep within the nothingness and air between him and the portal, shining with the soft golden light emanating from between them. The portal itself looks like the stars themselves have come down to brush up against humanity, a deep inky well of black spilling out of the air, filled with pinpricks of starlight.

"That's new, isn't it," Tony says, raising one gauntleted hand up to the swirling vortex.

The comm-link crackles on as his confusion catches the attention of the others. This time it's Cap, voice solid and warm and distantly concerned. "What is it, Iron Man?"

"You tell *me*," he replies, throwing his other hand up to gesture vaguely at the *thing* in the wall before him. "Jarvis, what're we looking at here?"

"It seems to be powered by some sort of energy adjacent to but not limited to the Tesseract, sir, I've never seen anything quite like it."

"So you're telling me the internet-wizard is confused too?" Groans Clint from the other side. "Drop the cords, Iron Man. I'm heading over."

There isn't much to do as the rest of the team heads to his location. Other than *banter*, Tony paces and watches the portal build, little bits of liquid starlight tearing away and dripping down the wall. It's beautiful, in a way, but he's long past his days of vanity. So with one repulsor up and another waving rapidly as he rants to Jarvis about the portal, he waits.

And then—

The portal glows, a brighter light than before, no longer golden but a familiar Tesseract *blue*. Tony looks to it with eyes slit with concentration, suddenly aware that he may be about to walk into a fight with anything from *armies* to *gods*.

“Think you all can go any quicker?” He quips into the comms, though any response is quickly drowned out by the sound of something mechanical. Of an almost *scream*, raw and broken like gears being snapped and metal bent. Tony gags as it fills the air, stuffing his ears, painful and loud, forcing him to bend over to desperately try and avoid the terrible *noise*.

But it just keeps growing, and growing, as the glow grows too, until the entire alley is a conglomeration of *screaming* and *light* and suddenly, blissfully, Jarvis shuts off noise input to the suit.

“*Fuck*,” he heaves raggedly, hands still held outward but shaking badly. The only thing keeping him upright now is the suit. “Thanks, Jarvis. Is it still getting louder?”

There's a short pause. Then: “...Yes, sir. Much louder. I believe the rest of the team is trying to reach you on line-“

“*Stark— come in!*”

Jarvis cuts off just as Tony switches comm lines, replaced by Steve's concerned tone. Some sort of odd fondness bubbles up inside — but it's replaced when the man continues to shout.

“Cool it, capsicle!” He retorts, lazily shaking his arms out and trying to unclench every goddamn muscle in his body. “I'm fine, everything's *fine*, the portal is just glowing and *screaming*—“

“Glowing and screaming portals are not a good sign, Man of Iron—“

“I got the memo, Thor,” Tony grumbles back. A quick switch back to outside noise being enabled shows that the sound has continued growing, and so has his own headache. “Alright. Deafen yourselves as best you can when you head over. Brucie's out of commission anyway. Thor, I need you to inspect this. Hawkeye, take your hearing aid out if you can. We probably need to start blocking civilians off from here, and I wouldn't be surprised if we get a visit for underoos or Daredevil while we're at this—“

He cuts off as suddenly, the noise from outside starts to filter into his helmet again. Though instead of that awful, inhuman screaming, it's been returned to normal. Car alarms and honks flicker through the nearly empty roads behind him. For a moment, it's like you can ignore the portal is even there.

And then —

A long, thin white hand crawls out from the portal, sinking through the mass as if feeling for someone on the other hand. It twists, the blackened, inhuman ends to its nails clawing through the air, cutting through the portal.

It's followed by an arm, clad in heavy blue fabric, swathed in golden rings and bracelets. And then a leg, and a shoulder, and the swell of a heavy blue cloak, lined with fur and adorned with filigree of golden and silver. And then *feathers*, black as the portal behind them, black as night, black as *death*, hanging in the air and shivering, bristling, as they are followed by a man.

Then the process repeats, a thicker hand held in the first, clawed and covered in a fine layer of pink-grey fur. An outfit of thick fabric and soft blue colors sweeps from the portal, heavy and regal and *expensive*. Gold hangs from every inch of this new thing's wrists, knuckles, even its *neck*, its *face*, a mask of ivory bone hanging from its skull, some awful and grotesque beast over another.

The first man, with blue eyes and blond hair and an exhausted expression, tilts his head to the side at Tony, gaze confused and inquisitive.

"They have redstone on the moon," he says, taking a step forward. The beast beside him follows, snorting at the first man's curiosity. "Techno, why would they have redstone on the *moon*—"

Tony doesn't hesitate. The whines of his repulsors fill the air as he lifts his hands, the blue glow from the portal disappearing as it starts to shrink, as his own light fills the air.

"Alright, uhh — winged man and friends," he starts, taking a step forward. The shorter of the men before him gasps, eyes lighting up. The taller shrinks back, eyes narrowing in suspicion behind the massive skull mask hanging over his expression. "Welcome to earth. Are you peaceful or do I need to break out the big guns?"

"Earth?" The winged man turns to the beast and frowns. "But— no." He turns back to Tony, scoffing a little. "Mate, we just *left* Earth. This is the moon."

He has to bark out a laugh at that. "Kid, look around you. Does this look like the moon?"

The man clearly doesn't take kindly to being called *kid*. His eyes narrow, his jaw twisting with irritation. "Alright, I'll admit it looks a little fucked up, but that portal doesn't *lead* to any other SMPs. It's supposed to lead to the *moon*. That's the whole point of a frozen stronghold to the *moon*."

"Look. Admittedly, I might be missing some vital context. But whatever the hell a frozen stronghold is? It didn't lead you to the moon. This is Earth, and I'm Iron Man. You two got names under all those robes?"

As it turns out, they have more than just names. The taller one slips a hand beneath his cloak and draws a *sword*, the metal a blackened, warped sort of thing, gold inlaid in the handle and

emerald green fashioned into the sides.

“Alright, then. Thor, we’ve got offworld foreigners— that’s your sorta thing.”

“Who is he—” the shorter chuckles. “Who is he talking to? Techno, this is so fucking weird —”

There’s a slam, and a squawk of surprise from the bird-man, and Tony whirls around to see Thor, standing behind him, Mjolnir still swinging in his heavy-handed grip. When he turns, both of the strange men are holding weapons — the taller with his sword, the bird man with his shoulders high, fingers taught around the thin string of a bow, a glowing purple light emanating from the wood and the arrow between them.

“He smells like lightning,” growls the larger man, and he advances, an arm going out, held protectively between the winged man and Tony and Thor. “Phil—”

“They’re not Asgardians,” says Thor, ignoring the two men. He cocks his head, walking up, expression confused more than worried or angered. “They’re not anything *I’ve* ever seen.

“*Rude.*”

“You’re the one showin’ up on our world in a creepy portal, friend,” Tony quips back to the shorter man’s response. “What is it we can do for you before you *head on your way?*”

The two share a look. The one called Phil shakes his head, laughing a little as he lowers his bow just enough to address Tony. “We’re not heading anywhere, mate. We only just *got here*. So if you’d just fuck off and let us on our way—”

“No can do, Maleficent. You’re from off-world — can’t have you runnin’ around and screwing things up.” He lifts his gauntlets again, getting ready to fire. Phil immediately lifts his bow once again, his mouth straight and eyes losing all mirth within them. Even Thor seems to recognize the sudden hostility. He strides up, Mjolnir crackling at his side. “Now if you’ll just surrender peacefully, we can figure this out.”

“The Antarctic Empire doesn’t *surrender.*”

The man with the bone mask advances quickly. He swings his sword out, and suddenly the sides are alight, flames licking up and through the air. He growls, and then an arrow is shot, only barely missing Tony — though it’s clear that this is only a warning, and that the winged man will not miss again.

“Alright! We’re doin’ this the hard way.” And, Tony fires.

The stunning bolt hits the larger man square in the chest, sending him flying a few feet away. The shorter man shouts roughly, fear invading the confidence in his voice as he runs after him. The second bolt misses — and Phil throws himself down next to the larger man, panicked.

“Tech- Technoblade, you’d better be ok—”

“S’ S all good, Phil,” mutters the one named *Technoblade*, waving a lazy, clawed hand. Tony takes a step back in surprise.

“That was full voltage, right, J?” He asks into his helmet, to which he’s given an affirmative. He whistles. “Alright, Thor. They might be stronger than we thought.”

Technoblade is already rising, staggering to his feet drunkenly as if all it has done is thrown his rhythm off. Suddenly, his sword is *gone*, replaced by a massive wooden crossbow, creaking with the weight of some sort of foreign, crude explosives linked into the top. He leverages it, pointing it directly at Tony, and then—

And then a blur of blue and red and white streaks through the sky, shining in the morning light, smashing into the crossbow and reducing it to a pile of broken wood on the ground. Technoblade lets out a roar of anger and yanks the shield off the ground before it can be returned to its owner, tossing it into the air and *right at Thor*.

“Alright!” Tony lets out another repulsor blast, this time at Phil. It hits him in the chest and he *screams*, guttural and disgusting, before collapsing to the ground, body twitching with the residual energy. Technoblade’s sword returns and some sort of battle cry falls from his lips. He *throws* it forward, and this time, it hits its mark.

Tony doubles over as the sword *sinks into his suit*, an alarm popping up on screen as the thing carves into the metal like butter. The hilt buries itself into his shoulder, immediately cauterizing the wound with the fiery edges. He stifles a scream into his helmet as Jarvis lists off the damage, eyes squeezed shut.

He hears Thor rush forward in his own moment of weakness. There’s a violent cry, the drawing of another weapon, and Mjolnir crashes against something, unable to break it with the first swing. From above comes Cap, landing just behind Technoblade, standing right above Phil, twitching on the ground, groaning, apparently not yet knocked completely out. *Who are these people?* How are they withstanding this — and where the hell have they come from?

“Get away from him!” Shouts Technoblade, launching himself into the Captain and *throwing him* to the side like a sack of potatoes. But Tony has recovered enough to stand, and Jarvis is on his side, and he raises his hands, and—

Technoblade falls to the ground with a *whump* and one last broken shout, body seizing as the electrical current reduces him to the same state as the man beside him. His sword clatters to the ground, his mask slipping from his face.

Tony, Cap, and Thor stand there, heaving out heavy breaths. They stare down at the offworlders.

Then Tony realizes the light from before has disappeared, the portal completely gone, leaving the wall behind them a blank slate of brick and mold as if nothing was ever there. A sharp sigh escapes him and he switches his comm channel with a groan of irritation.

“Fury?”

“Yes, Stark?” Is the answering response, SHIELD’s director’s dry, irritated tone ringing through his helmet.

“We have a problem.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

BOOYAHHHHHH SECOND CHAPTER

New thing I need to clarify: This is going to be almost like a plotty oneshot book. That means that I would LOVE if you guys sent me prompts for chapters going forward. You can suggest them in the comments of this fic or even in my discord, twitter, or tumblr, which are all linked below!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It smells like alcohol.

Though it's sharper, somehow. It invades Phil's sinuses and pulls at his skin, making him feel trapped by the thin and astringent scent. There's no sound to corroborate his hatred, only feeling. Something thin, and soft, and ridiculously comfortable lies beneath his stomach, his back to the skies. Whatever it is beneath his head is just as smooth as the material beneath his hands, and he pulls at it, fingers gently running across the silken fabric.

"You're awake."

He's startled out of his curiosity. The anger from before in that alley comes flooding back when the voice rings out from above. Whirling around, Phil finds himself in a completely white room, sitting on a small cot layered with a simple blanket. No one appears to be in the room — but the voice returns from a small black box in the corner.

"Ah, there you are. Don't try moving too much, you'll end up with a headache."

"Where are you?" He demands, wings spreading out, twitching, a nervous tick that he's glad is as intimidating as it is reflexive. "Come out and fight me you fucker!"

"Ah, you're all so *aggressive*. I'm in the walls, tinkerbell. Now sit down and explain to me who you are," says the voice, tone bored and relaxed. It's the same as that metal man's voice from earlier — though Phil still isn't sure if it was a man or a *machine*. "Seriously, John Doe. You got a name under there?"

"It's not fucking *Joe*," Phil spits right back. "Why should I tell you shit? You attacked me and my friend! Where is he?"

"Your little — haha, *little* — buddy is safe. Probably giving Bruce just as much shit as you're giving me! And your incentive for talking about who you are is that I'll let you see him if you

cooperate,” explains the magical voice.

It’s a tempting offer, but he knows not to make deals with faceless beings too quickly. His wings fold upon his back, breath slowing as he tries to let his heart settle, his mind *think*.

First step: Focus on what he can control. Clearly, he’s trapped with his back against a wall. (and surprisingly nice sheets?) He’s been given two choices — stay silent and sit here, or talk and see his friend. He could certainly lie, but what harm does it do to tell a bunch of people from what seems to be a whole other SMP who he is?

Uncurling from his defensive position on the bed, Phil presses his feet into the ground beneath him. He’s still wearing his winter robes, though he’s been stripped of all weapons, his cloak and crown removed. It makes him feel naked. Still, he’s fought in much worse conditions before, and his enemies have no idea who he is yet. That’s to his advantage. A name might not tell them anything at all.

“My name is Philza Craft,” he says evenly, taking a deep breath and letting the words come despite his hesitance. He stares into a distant wall, unflinching, unblinking. “Right hand to the emperor of the Antarctic Empire, conquerors of SMP Earth and then also relenquishers of said conquering.”

There’s a long pause. Then, a crackle of static, and a sigh. “Only about half of those words make sense to me. SMP?”

“Superimposed Magical Plane. Someone claims Admin and creates a plot of land. They have to—”

“Admin?” Interrupts the above voice. Phil lets out a huff of frustration.

“This is fucking pointless,” he groans, throwing his hands up. If he’s going to have to explain simple terminology to this person, what’s the point of talking at all? “You told me I just had to tell you who I am, not my whole goddamn *life story*. Now, where is my *friend*?”

There’s a rustling of clothes and then an *uh-huh* muttered under someone’s breath. “Fine. A deal is a deal.”

There’s a click. Suddenly, the wall he’s staring at is see-through, and he looks into a room identical to his own — with plain white tiling and walls, a simple cot, and a black box in the upper right corner. The only difference is the only one he cares about. *Techno*.

He’s running before he can stop himself. There’s no way for him to reach his friend entirely — to hug him, to touch him, to confirm he’s really there at all — but Phil is satisfied with slamming into the glass, grinning wickedly just as the other man sees him.

“Philza!” Techno cries, his eyes widening and a sigh of relief falling from his lips. He runs over, pausing to land a solid kick to the glass. “*Bruh*— This is— this is—”

“Fucked?” Phil offers, “Stupid as hell? Bullshit? Degrading?”

“All of the above,” replies the piglin hybrid, shoulders bouncing as he chuckles, devoid of their usual cape and adornments. But that quickly falls, his eyes narrowing as a serious expression overrides the relieved one from before. “Where in the world did that portal take us?”

“I don’t know— but they don’t even know what SMPs or Admins are here, Tech.” Phil throws his hands up hopelessly, spinning about as if to communicate his annoyance with the whole world. Then, remembering the second most annoying part of his current predicament — (the first being that he isn’t in the same room as Techno) — he points to the black box in his room. “And they have magical floating voices.”

“I know. I don’t get it. Why not magical floating text?”

“None of it is *magic*,” says the voice from above, dry and irritated as the crackle that accompanies its initial return. Phil grins —you should never show someone how to strike your nerves, and the voice has done just that. “And magical floating text doesn’t exist.”

“Yes it does,” Techno argues, frowning. “It’s a super simple plugin, I use it all the time.”

Phil listens to them banter over the semantics of plugins and magic and science and something called a *speaker*; when he suddenly remembers that whether he’s trapped or not, he has a wide arsenal of weapons in his possession. So long as they haven’t been able to strip his inventory...

Technoblade is just about to pull up the plugin on his communicator when Phil slips his hand into the fabric of the universe, fingers twitching as they drag apart the seam of the world. The man over the “speaker” lets out a half-shriek as his hand disappears and then reappears a moment later, holding his axe, the action of getting to his things as simple as ever.

“Hold on, mate,” Phil says boredly because he’s sorta sick of the “speaker’s” shit. Crushing glass with a netherite axe isn’t really much of a feat, and Technoblade must get the memo, because he steps back and Phil *slams* the blade into the window separating them.

It must be fortified. It cracks, but refuses to shatter, and so he places his foot on the glass and swings again, *slamming* it down. If the people keeping them trapped weren’t idiots, they would’ve killed them and cleared their inventories — even if Phil would’ve just died permanently, they wouldn’t have known that. But, apparently, they’re not good at much.

Techno laughs loudly as the “speaker” continues to shout. “The fuck are they doing?” Calls a new, rough voice, and there’s the sound of a chair being pulled away and someone frantically typing. “Shit— Tony, cut em off—”

“Jarvis, you know what to do,” replies the first man — *Tony?* — as Phil lands a final swing and the glass finally gives, shattering and falling to the ground, a thousand tiny mirrors sprinkling the tile and his boots. He moves through the glass, about to meet Techno, about to grab him by his arm and pull him into a victorious hug—

A low, yellow fog fills the room, and they both pause. It’s accompanied by the soft sound of a machine whirring, of something being released. Phil takes a deep breath, confused about the

new smell, and finds that it's almost *familiar*. He smells it again, spreading his wings and following the mist, turning around, feathers curiously pulling toward the origin.

Then he realizes where he recognizes the scent.

"It's— it's weakness," he gasps suddenly, hurrying through to the other room. Technoblade seems to be aware as well, because there's no reunion, no victorious grin or smile. His tusks are bared and his bright red eyes are narrowed, pupils slit with his anger. "Techno, they've got weakness, it's in the air—"

He looks around in his pockets as the two of them realize the futility of their situation. "Fuck— I don't have a— a mask."

"S— s'ok, cover your—" Phil coughs into his arm, suddenly finding that his next step takes a fair bit of effort. His wings sag, unable to resist the pull of sleep as they sink, falling down, down, deeper and deeper into the tiles beneath him, the cold material brushing up against his feathers. His knees shake, his arm feeling heavier than ever, unable to remain crooked into his jaw. "Cover your nose."

"I—" Techno coughs as well, claws twitching as they drag across his face, scrambling to stay there and to protect him. He looks around the room wildly, trying to find any sort of escape.

It's no use. Phil's knees finally collapse, his ankles twisting to the side painfully as he falls to the ground. For the first time since he watched Techno get shot by that portable lighting, he's *afraid*. He gasps, trying desperately to avoid the yellow mist, but everything is so *heavy*. His tongue sticks to his teeth as he tries to speak, his breath only a whistle in the air, not even enough strength left in his spine for him to curl inward on himself. It seems the same can be said for his companion.

The piglin hybrid twists around and stumbles, expression suddenly fearful as it lands on Phil, trapped against the ground. In the end, it doesn't matter. Techno falls all the same, back hitting the wall and head cracking against the floor as he slides, limp, into the tiles.

Phil feels sleep wash over him, thick and unwanted. The world goes quiet and his vision goes black.

—

The second time that Phil wakes up, it isn't on a bed. His back rests uncomfortably against a stiff metal chair, his wrists handcuffed together to the slats of the seat. The lighting situation also hasn't improved. It's *hideously* bright, a circular white light shining directly at him and his friend.

At least Techno is there. He's tied up too, sure, but he's *alive*, and that's what matters the most right now. Phil focuses on what he *can* control. That, right now, is his sanity.

This time when someone finally speaks the voice comes from a woman. A door in the wall beside him opens before he has a chance to try and wake Techno, and a woman appears behind it.

“My name is Natalie,” she says, stepping inside, her footsteps noticeably silent. She scans the two of them, though in a way that makes it seem like she’s not trying to. Her hair is a bright, fiery red, tied up in a high ponytail, swinging about her shoulders with every step she takes. Out of all the people they’ve met today, she’s the only one wearing anything normal — just a simple black dress with a golden collar at the throat. “Natalie Rushman. I’d like to thank you for your... *attempted* cooperation earlier, and I’d like to ask who you are and what you intend to do here.”

For a long moment, Phil just stares at her. Techno doesn’t seem much more conscious than he feels, head lolling over lazily, a bored expression in place where a furious one had been earlier.

“We... already told you who we are. Or I did—” he tries to point to Techno before he realizes his hands are still cuffed and he curses. “*Shit*. I did, and he didn’t. That’s Technoblade, emperor of The Antarctic Empire.”

“See- you keep talking about this empire,” she continues, her hand slipping through the air as she shrugs. “-but there’s something we must be missing here. The Antarctic is virtually uninhabitable, and there’s certainly no *stronghold* beneath it.”

Phil smirks. Natalie appears uncaring as she asks questions, not worrying much about the possible answers. But beneath it all — and as the most subtle hint in the tone of her voice — is a true curiosity. He can *use that*.

“Tha’s the thing,” Techno drawls, yawning loudly, his head flying backward and making a painful sounding *clonk* on the back of the chair. Phil snickers. It certainly isn’t the *most* unprofessional they’ve been during an interrogation. “We didn’t come from *yer’* arctic, that’s for sure. Our portal was supposed to spit us out on the moon. Not...”

“New York,” replies Natalie helpfully.

“New York!” Phil repeats. “No fuckin’ kidding, huh. Yeah, next you’ll be tellin’ me you’ve got a statue of liberty out here.”

She stares at him. She blinks. She *nods*.

Ok — maybe he’s a bit more out of his depth than he thought. Wings fluttering nervously, he considers. *New York* — it’s a similar enough name to *Bean York* that it catches him off guard. The whole situation does, honestly. It’s all too inane to wrap his wings around, and if he weren’t handcuffed to a chair he might be staggering and confused and *worried*.

“Yeah. Anyways, we were supposed to be on the moon. Not— *New York*. I’ve— I’ve got a question though, Rushman—” and Techno does that little crinkle of his nose that he always does when he’s confused, like he really is full piglin. “Who’s the guy in the metal suit?”

The woman laughs a little. It’s fake — as everything about her is — but with a real undercurrent of mirth behind it. As if she’s laughing, but not at what Techno has said. Everything about her is deliberate in this same manner. Everything about her is a performance, but one that she has started to forget isn’t real.

“That’s Iron Man. A member of The Avengers.”

“And the Avengers are...?”

“A team of very special people sent off to fight very special threats,” she explains simply. “Iron Man is just another man in a suit. There’s someone else inside.”

“And does *he* have a name?” Techno asks, raising his eyebrows at the back and forth questioning.

“Tony Stark. A very wealthy and eccentric man who is probably listening to this right now and very frustrated with my descriptions.” Her eyes flicker up to a corner of the room, and she smiles, though her head doesn’t move. “There is also Thor Odinson, Captain America, The Black Widow, Hawkeye, The Hulk, The Falcon, and several others on reserve.”

It’s Phil’s turn to ask questions. He leans forward, craning his neck at her, hair falling from the braid he’d had it in before he left. He’s sick of the back and forth and the waiting, of the bright white light drowning his senses and the scent of alcohol pervading everywhere he goes. “Why are we being kept here, Miss. Rushman?”

A smile spreads across her face and roosts there, a dark-feathered bird, talons sharp and eyes watchful. “Good question, Mr. Craft. You see—” she stands, now starting to circle the room, looking forward and anywhere but at them. “You’re currently in The Avenger’s tower — their main base of operations. We’ve been tasked with hoisting you off into a maximum-security prison in the middle of the ocean where you’ll never be found.”

Phil bristles, his wings immediately on edge, a hoarse chuckle falling from his lips. “You haven’t got the slightest idea of what we’re capable of. You’d be lucky to keep us long enough to get us anywhere.”

“We got you here, didn’t we?” She retorts back, smiling sweetly to herself. And Phil has to admit — she’s right. Both Techno and him are in completely uncharted territory, and they’ve been caught off guard far too many times already. It seems Techno has come to the same conclusion, no matter how cool and calculated he appears. Phil *knows* his friend’s anxieties. His *worries*. And whatever it is that Techno is thinking right now, it isn’t a good plan. “I think you’ll find you shouldn’t underestimate us. Besides — you do have options.”

He shares a look with his companion. Techno squints, shrugging very slowly, thinking for a long moment before he actually responds. “...Options?” he says, his voice just sideways of optimism.

“Options,” Rushman repeats with a curt nod. “You have options. Now— you haven’t presented yourselves as strictly hostile beings. We need more people with knowledge of off-world threats in *this* world. What I’m really saying here is that we’re offering you a job.”

Finally, she stops pacing, standing directly in front of the bright white light illuminating the room, her fire-red hair turning as golden as wheat. Hands behind her back, a vicious, cunning smile on her lips, she says what she really means.

“You have two options. Get carted off to The Raft or remain here with us, housed with The Avengers until we can be sure that you are sane enough to go out on probation. Those are your options.”

Then, as an afterthought:

“We do not negotiate.”

She falls silent. It seems there’s nothing else to say. Phil looks to his friend with a firm, emotionless expression that he cannot feel. He knows that Rushman won’t know his ticks — but Techno surely sees them. The rising of his feathers, the twist of his brow. All the subtle things that mean he has *no idea what to do*.

They’re reflected back on the face he watches now. Bright red eyes, narrowed with concealed anxiety, thin lips pressed together against long tusks, the golden rings they’re typically adorned with gone, probably deemed a weapon and stripped from his person before he woke up. Their eyes meet. Techno’s head twitches up only the slightest, and he sighs.

Natalie must sense that a decision has been made. Phil nods without even knowing what it is himself — because he trusts whatever decision that is without question.

“Do we have to pay for our own food?”

Ok — that wasn’t even close to what he’d guessed Techno would say. It’s so left field that Phil startles, frowning as he looks over to the other man. “Why are you the official emperor again?”

“Sh-sh-shhh. Do we?”

Natalie looks half stunned as well. But she recovers quickly, shrugging her shoulders as if to say it isn’t the weirdest question she’s ever been asked.

“No. Not unless you w-”

Techno leans back and grins — though there are far too many teeth and his eyes are a bloodthirsty shade of red. “When do we start?”

—

As it turns out, “starting” just means being questioned for hours and hours and *hours*.

They ask why Phil can pull things out of thin air. He does it again and it scares them, so he explains. They don’t understand. They ask Techno about the location of the Antarctic Stronghold and he just shrugs. They ask the two of them what an SMP, Admin, or Stronghold is, to which all of their answers just seem to confuse their interrogators more. Natalie Rushman is gone, replaced by several new clueless men dressed in bulky black hardware, all chunky breastplates that look utterly useless in comparison to the netherite Phil and Techno are used to.

They seem completely baffled by every single straightforward answer they're given. It starts getting irritating — especially after they pull guns on Phil when he pulls an apple out of his inventory. What is he going to do with an *apple*?

(A lot. But they don't know who he is — so all they see is a normal piece of fruit.)

After what he can only assume is several hours go past, they finally ease off. Only then are Techno and Phil unhandcuffed, allowed to walk around their tiny cell and stretch their legs. Or, in Phil's case, his wings. They ache, the bones making terrible cracking noises that have Techno flinching in worry as he finally pushes them outward, the wingspan too big to fit their tiny cube of a jail cell.

The room is vacated, leaving the two of them to stew in silence. No one returns for a long while, the only noise the rushing of air through small metal plates in the ceiling, slit and turned outward. A soft breeze blows through them, flattening over Phil's wings and blowing his hair around. It's pleasant, though he's too uncomfortable to enjoy it.

He's just about to break the silence and see if that voice that had come from the ceiling earlier is still there when the door opens again. There stands another red-haired woman — though hers is more natural than Rushman's, a fiery orange rather than scarlet. Her face has a smattering of freckles, her smile pleasant, though tense. Phil stands to face her.

"Hello there," she says, nodding at them each in turn. She looks uncomfortable — but to her credit, she doesn't flinch. Not even when Technoblade bares his tusks, sneering at the display of politeness. "My name is Virginia Potts."

She pauses, and it comes to Phil that she's giving them a chance to reintroduce themselves. He smiles, matching the stressed and pinched one she's giving them.

"Philza Craft, ma'am," he replies, stretching out a hand for her to shake. She does, looking curiously down at the black-tipped talons that make up his fingers. Hers are long, and thin, and slender, veins protruding slightly with age. Almost exactly the same height as Phil with her heels on, their eyes meet, and he finds that they're a flinty and unyielding silver-blue.

Turning to Technoblade, she gives him the same nod. This time *she* holds out *her* hand, and he takes it as he stands, begrudgingly shaking it. "Technoblade. That's it. No last name."

This doesn't seem to surprise her much, confirming Phil's suspicion that she already knows who they are and what they've said. He squints, considering her. She doesn't look incredibly impressive — thin and small, dressed in a pant suit and heels, fingernails painted bloody red. But looks can be deceiving, so he asks anyways.

"You one of the Avengers?"

Potts laughs, a dry, snort of a thing, and shakes her head. "Oh, absolutely not. Tony can try all he wants to get me in a suit but I'm just his personal assistant."

"Obviously not *just* a personal assistant," Techno says, "If he trusts you to address potentially dangerous individuals with plenty'a unknown *talents*."

To that, she just smiles. Knowingly, like there's a secret being kept between them. "Well. I've been a personal assistant for a long time, Mr. Technoblade."

"Technoblade," he replies. "Just call me Technoblade."

She smiles. "Then you can call me Pepper. Follow me?"

Upon leaving the room, it's revealed that they've been stuck in a long corridor full of identical doors. The ceiling is hung with bright white lights, emanating out of long, thin strips of glass. They shine down onto the tiling on the ground, reflecting into the mirrored surfaces and making a catwalk effect.

Pepper leads them down the hallway, not pausing a single time, even as Techno and Phil slow down, scanning their odd, unfamiliar surroundings. Her heels clip the ground, rapping against it noisily, only going silent when she opens a new door at the end of the hall.

This one leads to a small room. This room leads to *another* set of doors, which seems counterintuitive — especially because there are no handles on the doors. There is a button beside the double panels, which Pepper clicks, leading to them sliding open and revealing yet *another, smaller* room on the other side.

"So many doors," Techno mutters. "Why not just have one door to one room?"

"These aren't doors," she says as she steps inside, beckoning for them to follow. There's a panel covered in buttons — ones with numbers 1-93, ones with a weird red hat on them, one with a lock and no key in sight. The room itself is made of mirrors, glass projecting their expressions everywhere they look.

It's a tight squeeze with Phil's wings, but he ends up curling one around Technoblade's back protectively and tucking the other as close to his skin as he can get it. His head swivells owlshly as he attempts to stare back at every single individual versions of the occupants of the small, mirrored room, going far, far into the void, deep in the mirrors. Pepper smiles politely and presses a button, the doors before them shutting again and a soft *ding* playing as a light turns on above them, a small panel labeling the doors with a number.

5.

Then there's a jolt, and a whir, as the room starts to *move*.

Phil immediately ducks down, pulling Technoblade to the floor as well as he tries to cover himself, the jolting, grinding, shifting experience continuing without pause. Techno moves to his side as quickly as possible, the two shoulder-to-shoulder as they try to protect the other as best they can. The sensation makes his stomach drop in a manner entirely different to a flying dive or a high jump on a horse. It feels like he's truly *falling*, with no way to be caught.

"What... are you doing?" Asks Pepper, sounding slightly concerned. She hasn't moved to sit yet, but all that runs through Phil's mind is *danger, danger, danger* as the room continues to shift, his body feeling as if it's being shoved into the floor, his wings grounded, unable to properly flap.

“Wh- Trying not to fucking *die*?” He exclaims, turning all about in an attempt to figure out where the movement of the tiny room is coming from.

“Uhm.” She blinks at them, bending over and tilting her head, a soft smile upon her lips as she watches their tiny huddle. It’s almost a little insulting. “Have you— never seen an elevator?”

“*Elevator*?” Techno says, aghast, his face screwing up against his will. “Where’s the water? How is this deathtrap box a— an *elevator*?”

Pepper just continues to stare at them and smile as they wait for an answer. Phil has *seen* elevators before. They’re incredibly easy to make, too — just shove enough kelp into a shute of souls and water and then you’ve got a quick and easy way to get up to another floor, so long as you can hold your nose that long. This tiny, claustrophobic box, swinging and jerking around, is *not* an elevator.

“I can assure you it’s perfectly safe,” she tries to explain, straightening back up and looking toward the ceiling. “Uhm— Jarvis, would you—?”

“Certainly, Ms. Potts.”

A voice rings out from nothingness, reminding Phil of that man from before, taunting them from inside that thing called a speaker. This time, it has an accent like his own — though it’s far more dignified, refined, syllables rolling gently together like an ocean’s wave. The name is recognizable from when the redstone man had spoken to the same person before.

“Hello, Mr. Craft and Mr. Technoblade,” continues the voice . “My name is Jarvis, which stands for Just A Rather Very Intelligent System. I am a form of artificial intelligence created by Mr. Stark—”

“What, like an NPC?” Asks Phil, frowning. He’s begun to stand again, curling his wing back against his back as Techno rises with him, the two helping each other up. They may not understand the mockery of an elevator, but it seems safe enough to let their guard down, if only for just a moment.

“I— excuse me?”

“A non player character? A fake person that like, gives out exposition or whatever,” Techno explains. “You one of those?”

“No.” The voice sounds genuinely confused. “Not quite. An artificial intelligence is intelligence displayed by machines, as opposed to the natural intelligence of an animal, or of either of yours. Though I’m certainly much more *natural* than most AI’s, I’m still not exactly like you or Ms. Potts. May I continue?”

Phil and Techno both nod. All the new words are leaving him reeling. Elevators without water, mechanics without redstone, intelligence without life.

“An elevator is a type of transportation car that leads one up or down a vertical shaft, typically in a multi-floored building. It’s aided by a system of levers and pulleys, to make it simple. You are currently in a fully secured elevator taking you up to the penthouse floor of the Avengers Tower,” explains Jarvis.

By the time he finishes, Phil is much more confused than before, but at least he knows that as long as Pepper Potts isn’t supposed to die today in this elevator, they won’t as well. Still, he keeps one wing unfolded, curling around Technoblade’s back as he anticipates the worst.

The rest of the ride doesn’t take long. Phil counts the seconds under his breath — realizing that though it may be made of some sort of foreign fancy technology, the elevator still takes longer than one he would use at home. Eventually, the rattling box comes to a stop, another ding signifying their arrival as the light atop the elevator doors changes its number to 93.

“Before we get out, let me explain.” Pepper turns to the two of them. Her expression has changed from pleasant to serious. Something about her has changed in only seconds, a heat and power in her words — though it’s as subtle as the sun behind clouds. “The only reason that you two are going to ever be allowed on this floor is due to the fact that you are foreign entities, but your use currently outweighs how dangerous you are. This is the communal Avenger’s floor. You will both be given a bedroom of your own and you will both be under continued surveillance until you are deemed safe enough to have privacy. When I open this door, you will meet the Avengers. I would suggest that you don’t make any trouble.”

By the end of the *intense* warning, both Phil and Techno are silent, staring at each other and perhaps just a little worried for their futures. But then his friend shrugs, giving the suggestion a little roll of his bright red eyes. Phil wonders what his chat is telling him now.

“Fair enough,” he replies gruffly. “Alright. Let’s see these *Avengers*. ”

Pepper nods once more. Then, the doors from before open, sliding away in the same manner as they had all the way on that level five.

The room revealed is large. *Much* larger than the one they’d been interrogated in. Perhaps even larger than some rooms in their several fortresses. It has a soft grey material for its floors, spotless and shining, almost as if it’s constructed from quartz. The ceilings are high and vaulted, unobstructed by pillars or supports, looking as if they’re floating in air. Couches longer than four horses in quick succession lie about *casually*, many plush and blanket-coated chairs sitting in front of a long black platform hanging from the wall.

The best part, though, ignoring the massive dining-room table or the plush rugs or the beautiful decorative lighting or the food, the people, the rugs, the books, the *anything*, are the *windows*.

Stretched across and replacing several circular walls are massive sheets of flawless glass. They overlook a massive kingdom of silver and golden light, tiny squares and rectangles of metal and glass and of wood and plants and seemingly every material *imaginable* all sitting below. They’re so high up in the sky that perhaps, Phil is closer to the stars here and now than he ever has been before.

His jaw drops open before he can stop it, and he steps out of the elevator, wingtips dragging against the ground as they sag, unable to keep up with his shock. Awe floods him as he takes in the beauty of the sky, held above him so that he might not even need to *fly* to surf through it. The purple-blue hues of sunset have started to set in on the far horizon, all of the strange people and places below him so *tiny* in comparison to this miniature universe he's been drawn into.

"It's a piece of work, isn't it?" says a familiar voice. Phil is snapped from his reverie as a small group of people appears — or perhaps they were always there, he'd just been so caught up in the view that they'd become virtually invisible.

Leading them all is a short, tired-looking man sporting a scruffy unshaven goatee and a cup of coffee — which has apparently done nothing to scrub away the dark black bags beneath his eyes. His shoulder is wrapped in heavy bandages beneath his tank top, his arm in a sling — and it's then that Phil recognizes him as the voice from the redstone suit.

"How did you make it?" He blurts, his wings shrugging upward and down before he can stop his pure excitement from showing. "The suit — what is it from? Copper? Redstone? Some sort of enchantment?"

The man just stares. Then: "Uhhh— oh. You mean the Iron Man suit."

"It's iron!" Quips a man behind the first one — *Tony stark*. This second man is tall, heavily muscular, dressed in something a bit more familiar to Phil. His hair is blond, braided down his back, a scruffy beard not growing on but seeming to inhabit his jaw. That's the one who was called *Thor*. "Man of iron!"

"No, it's— it's not," Tony sighs nasally, tossing back another drink of his coffee. "It's made of gold-titanium alloy."

"Alright, we'll I've heard of *gold*," says Techno, walking up behind Phil, squinting dubiously. "But— I dunno about all this titan'im or alloys."

Phil knows with great certainty that Techno has heard the words titanium and alloy before. He snickers again at his friend's fake disbelief and the subsequent groan that Stark lets out.

"Ok, Tony, that's all— entirely irrelevant," says *Natalie Rushman*. Her outfit has changed, replaced by an oversized black shirt and jeans. Everything about her professional demeanor has decayed — but the cold, unyielding look to her has not. Her hair may be down and she may be padding across the ground barefoot, but Phil can tell it's because she thinks a fight might break out, and because she wants to be silent. There's no charity in her eyes. "I'm Natasha Romanoff."

"Nice to meet you, Natalie," Techno replies dryly, putting his hand out. The woman smirks but does not take it.

"And this is Clint Barton," she continues after a long moment of ignoring the outstretched hand. Techno still does not put his hand down. *Natasha* stretches her hand out to point at a

scruffy-looking blond man, currently flicking his hand frantically across a small, glowing screen, almost like a communicator.

“Yeah, I’m— sorta busy, nice to meet you—” He looks up and visibly startles. Then, with a grin, he rushes forward, taking Technoblade’s hand and letting out a long whistle, though his eyes are stuck on Phil. Or, more specifically, the feathers behind him. “Woah, holy shit your wings are *awesome*, what’re they made of? Think you can hook me up with a pair?”

Phil bristles anxiously, his wings drawing up to be flush to his back. His wings are his *own*. A rarity, and that’s for a reason. He’s had enough of people attempting to take his wings. To touch them, to feel them, to *steal them* — as if they are theirs to own, and not his.

“I was born with them, mate,” he says sharply. “They’re attached to my back.

This apparently completely stuns Barton. He takes a step back, mouth still ajar, and receives a harsh slap on the back from Stark for his manners. “This is why you listen to Natasha when she explains things to you, Legolas.”

“You’re a real motherfucker, Stark,” he replies. Phil starts to decide he does not like Clint Barton very much.

Then, the last person accompanying the group — tall, excessively muscular, blond, the man who had thrown a shield and absolutely destroyed Techno’s rocket launcher — sighs, stepping forward and massaging his temples. He looks distinctively exhausted in a way that none of the others do, as if he’s gone 200 years sleeping and now has forgotten how.

“Hi. I’m sorry about them —” he gestures back to the rest of the group (sans Natasha, for whatever reason) with a glare shot behind his back. “We haven’t had much time to prepare a proper welcome. I’m Steve Rogers.” He holds out a hand. This time, Techno actually shakes it. Phil chuckles into his sleeve. “We aren’t the full team, but some of us have been busy recently. You and your magical portal to another world didn’t exactly afford us any spare time.”

“I can imagine,” Techno replies dryly.

Rogers smiles. It’s warm and genuine, as if he actually finds that funny. Phil agrees — it is, but not many people usually like Techno’s humor as much as he does. (Which is a tragedy, but he can’t go around killing people for not laughing at his friend’s jokes. Usually.)

“Anyways. I know how it feels to be in the wrong—” he tapers off, coughing awkwardly. “In a *different*, time. Sorry, my therapist is having me work on my phrasing.”

Phil has no clue what that means or who a therapist is, but he nods anyway, shooting Technoblade a confused glance. He’s given one right back in return. It seems they’re both completely clueless — which is perhaps a little comforting.

“Now,” interrupts Stark, stepping forward and tapping at the front of a slightly larger version of Barton’s odd glowing screen. “You two have been allotted an unused guest floor here.

You'll stay there until y' prove yourselves useful or whatever else. Feel free to come up to the communal floor at any time, though." He grins and winks. "All the best coffee is up here."

"Coffee..." Phil mutters under his breath. Gods, it's been a long time since he was able to get his hands on any *coffee*.

The goateed man just raises his eyebrows into a shocked expression and nods. "Oh— oh, Thanatos knockoff likes coffee too? Ok, maybe we'll get along a bit more than I thought."

With that — and a slightly offended scoff from Phil — they're led back into the "elevator," without the other Avengers. The doors close as the rest of the group scatters about the floor, chatting and walking and tapping at glowing screens. Stark pushes a button on the elevator and it jolts. Phil has to stifle the impulse to flinch — but it's not as bad as it was last time.

"I assume Jarvis already introduced himself?" They nod. "Right. Well, ask him anything any time. Ask for *most* things *most* of the time and you'll probably get it. He'll rattle off any information about our Earth for ya' if you're confused, but I wouldn't count on just him." He moves his eyebrows up and down playfully. It seems that Stark relies on his eyebrows a *lot*. "Talk to us. You're gonna have to *consult* for us, so I'd suggest playing nice too. Learn a thing. Or don't!"

The elevator skips to a stop and Phil lets out a frustrated huff as he involuntarily flinches again. The doors before them slide open, slowly letting in soft, glowing light, and a view of the room they'll be staying in. He braces himself for dirt and grime. For broken beds and frozen air without a pillow in sight, the only thing to rest your head on another body or the stone. He waits, watching carefully for what he knows, surely, he'll have to endure.

The doors retract. Phil's stomach drops.

"This..."

For a long moment, he's struck speechless, the words choking off with a soft *chirp* of a noise in the back of his throat. He steps forward, mystified by the place.

It's *beautiful*.

Simple, modern, but beautiful. Thick marble pillars hold up a staircase to a second floor, a soft brown rug thrown at the ends of the steps. The windows from before are back and even more beautiful, the skyline already so different now that they've been taken down a floor or two. He spins around, slowly surveying all the details, dizzily watching as Technoblade attempts to take in the same sight. "This is— This is *ours*?"

Starks snorts, waving at the elevator doors as they close. "What do you take me for? I'm a good host, Mr. Craft. This was originally supposed to be Thor's floor so it's a little *rustic* for my tastes. He took another floor. I never redecorated."

It isn't that the floor they'd already seen had been *bad*. Not by a long shot — it was clear the luxury had been made for the people of this age and this earth. But the intricate carvings in the pillars, the fine paintings hung on the walls, the assorted animal skins thrown over the

massive couches, facing the sunset — it's like they could've walked out of the Antarctic Stronghold.

It's also entirely everything he hadn't expected. This place is made for comfort, not pain. For living, not surviving. And, as much as Phil knows he can't trust it, he takes a single moment to *hope*.

Phil watches as Techno swallows, something mystified and awed in his eyes. It isn't often that he sees his friend so excited. So free of troubles, crawling out from beneath the weight of the world that perpetually lies upon his shoulders. It's enough to make a smile crawl onto his own face, eyes crinkling as something warm curls up in his heart, fond and proud and *vulnerable*.

"Uhm— Stark, respectfully—"

The man cuts Technoblade off with a short *shhh* and a grimace. "Uh— nope. Stark was my father — just call me Tony, will you?"

Techno blinks owlishly. "...Sure. *Tony*? Isn't this a little extravagant for what is essentially a couple of political prisoners?"

That startles a laugh out of Tony. He tips his head back, lets out a single cackle, and then replies. "First off— you're not political prisoners. You're probably interdimensional prisoners or something, don't ask me or Fury or anyone else because none of us knows. Second, fiddler pig, Yes, I'm sure. This is about as basic as it gets in here."

Phil is the one to chuckle this time. "Basic? Mate, most of the accommodations back at home include being waterboarded or havin' your feathers yanked off." He lets out another laugh, missing Tony's flinch at the words. "This is fucking *insane*."

When he finally does look back at his *host*, the man looks distinctly uncomfortable. There's a furrow in his brow despite the neutrality of his look, and he nods awkwardly as if he isn't sure what else to do.

Then his expression hardens. "Yknow, that's a really shitty joke."

Phil frowns, taken aback. "I know I was laughing, but I wasn't actually *kidding*. Shit happens all the time." He shrugs.

This doesn't seem to help. To his confusion, Tony looks almost... *pained*, when he looks back. "Torture isn't really... commonplace, Craft," he says, with a voice that now borders on disturbed. "Not unless you count Jarvis withholding coffee from me when he's feeling cranky."

"Or when you're on the verge of passing out, sir," Jarvis adds from above.

"Right, right, semantics." He waves a hand dismissively. "Anyways: the point is that you're supposed to be working for us. I'm assuming torture won't make you any more pleasant. That was a joke — we don't torture people. *At all*," Tony replies point-blank.

Phil and Technoblade just stare at him uncomprehendingly. They share matching looks. Neither one stops being confused.

“...Ok,” Tony continues, giving them all a funny look before he turns back around. “Let’s get on with the tour.”

—

Here’s the thing: Phil is used to luxury.

Or he knows what luxury *is*, even if he very rarely gets a chance to indulge in it by himself. He knows about massive beds laden with fur and gold and velvet. He’s seen kingdoms in which the rich eat plentifully and the poor do too.

This is a step *far* beyond what Phil has ever dreamed of.

Four bedrooms, a bathroom allotted to each. A massive living room area with a dining room, a kitchen with a thousand different things he will never know how to use, and even a fully stocked *library*. There’s running water — *hot and cold?* — which is apparently a thing, and more food than he thinks he could eat in a year.

So, as far as the living conditions for prisoners goes, he thinks this can’t even be compared to anything else.

When Tony leaves the floor — with a lazy salute and a nod — both Phil and Techno silently wander about at each other’s sides, gazing longingly at the fantastical things they’ve never once been able to indulge in. There are blankets strewn all over the fully-made beds, the sheets silken and soft and beautiful. There are places he can perch and sit, places both him and Techno can relax, places he can just *be* in. There’s enough dishes to feed a kingdom. The air is cool and comfortable and Jarvis even tells them that they can change it, should they ever need to.

It’s odd. While finally being left alone lets Phil’s worry fester, finally pressing its way between his ribs and into his throat, he thinks he can almost feel hope crawling up beneath it.

Neither of them has an appetite for food. It just doesn’t matter right now, in this strange, foreign world, where the buildings are taller than mountains and there are wonders they’ve never once dreamed of discovering. They know they’re being watched. They know that this peace they feel is momentary, but it doesn’t matter.

Phil strips down to his undershirt and slacks, sliding his boots neatly up against a nearby wall beside his clothes. Techno does the same, pulling his cloak to the side and draping it on one of the couches. As if clockwork, they settle, the sunset illuminating them in gold and pink light. Phil slides his legs over Techno’s lap, lying back against the armrest of the couch, and he watches his friend as the sun goes down.

His pink hair is like a bonfire, lazily tied back and draping his cheeks as he nods to sleep. Scars mar his neck, his face, his hands — but they’re all ones that Phil recognizes. Through the bleary film of sleep covering his eyes, Technoblade just looks...

Like home.

The soft sound of their breathing mingling together is the last thing Phil hears as he sinks gently into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

My discord server was so fucking scared when I said there was a small bit of angst in this chapter. How do you like me now??? huh???????????????? this is fluffy as FUCK.
Smh smh smh

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Very brief warnings in this chapter! There is some panic/anxiety attack stuff, and someone makes a passing joke about being suicidal. Otherwise it's all clear!

Also, I want to thank you guys real quick. The support for this fic... It's insane. In only 3 days, we've already gotten to 400 kudos! That's nuts to me!! Thank you guys so, so much ahhh!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno wakes up before Phil does. His friend has curled up while he sleeps, wings tucked all about his frame, legs tugged off of Techno's knees and pressed into his chest. It doesn't look comfortable, though Techno is much more used to spreading out anyways, throwing his head back and his arms wherever he pleases.

The sunset from the night before has vanished, replaced by starlight, the moon sinking below the horizon as the sun starts to return. Gentle hues of orange and pink mingle with the indigo of night, all the softest lights brushing against the buildings below.

His legs no longer trapped by Phil's, Techno stretches, yawning silently as his back cracks, knuckles making thick *snap-snap-snaps* as he presses them together. He stands from the couch, his bare feet flexing on the quartz tiling beneath them, cool and dry and comforting. Each step forward feels like it's dragging him closer to the windows, and he places on palm upon them, mesmerized by the slowly rising sun.

This house is a lie. All of it is. The people within it, the luxuries it holds. Techno knows this — knows he will never trust this place or its inhabitants. *Can* never. He turns away from the window for a brief moment, though, and his eyes settle on Phil. His partner, his friend, his home. Phil, curled up on the couch, buried in his own wings and a few of the heavy pillows that had been lying there when they entered.

Technoblade looks at his friend with a heavy heart, and he *hopes*.

He hopes until he remembers that Stark — or *Tony* — had said something about hot coffee. Unfortunately, when glancing over at the kitchen, he sees exactly two things he recognizes. A fancy-looking silver stovetop and a sink that looks far too fancy to be anything but art.

Jarvis must sense his confusion because from above he speaks, tone even, and questioning, helpful. "Excuse me, Mr. Blade. Do you need help locating anything in the kitchen? I can explain things as we go."

“S’ Technoblade,” he grunts back. Then, walking up to the island in the middle of the kitchen and placing his palms against the marble, he groans, and he nods. “Sure. How do I get coffee?”

Suddenly, beneath a long stretch of cupboards, a machine’s light flashes blue. It’s a small cylindrical pot held in a black chamber, the light appearing from the top, where a screen and a set of buttons lie. “This is an automated coffee pot. If you’ll locate the cabinet below it, there will be a selection of coffees to choose from.”

He does, crouching down and shoving his head into the cupboard, expecting a small bag of black grains or even some beans that still have to be crushed. Instead, he finds rows upon rows of opaque, shiny bags with all sorts of extravagant names. Pumpkin spice and caramel latte and espresso and floral and — and Techno gets dizzy just staring at it all, blankly letting the seconds pass as he attempts to make a selection.

“My apologies, Technoblade. Do you not know what each coffee type is?”

He turns to the ceiling, eyebrows raising very slowly. “Uh. No.”

“Would you like me to explain the tastes or would you prefer I just picked out a simple brew for you to make?” Jarvis asks. All of the choices are so confusing. Coffee is coffee, and since when does he have choices about what type he can make? When has coffee ever been *floral* or *pumpkin* or *caramel*?

“Bruh...” He glances back down at the cabinet below him and shakes his head. Absolutely not. He isn’t touching that with a ten-foot pole. “Just... throw one at me, will yah?”

“Very well,” replies the AI — though Techno still doesn’t buy that artificial intelligence stuff. If Jarvis is smart enough to talk like a human, act like a human, and interact with other humans, what’s keeping him from sort of just... being one? “There should be a package labeled “Dark Roast” with bright red lettering. If you will select it?”

He leans over and finds the bag, dragging it back up, finding that it’s surprisingly heavy compared to the ration bags he’s used to. Plunking it down on the counter, he looks back up at the ceiling above him, awaiting further instructions.

Jarvis leads him through the surprisingly complex process of making his coffee, patiently and kindly reading off instructions and answering questions. Techno is given choices between the size of his coffee, what mug he wants, what sort of milk, creamer, sugar or artificial sweetener he wants. Apparently, you can even put *syrops* in your coffee. He loads a bunch of chocolate in. It doesn’t even taste particularly good, but a flare of excitement shoots through him at the idea that he’s *learning something*.

Phil has yet to wake up yet, still curled up in his nest on the couch. Techno looks back with a fond grin as he sips his coffee, thinking about the fact that now, he can teach his friend how to make it too. Chat seems to love this idea as well — softly chanting a chorus of *E E E* and *Sleepza* and *zzzz*. They’ve been surprisingly quiet this morning, so Techno just smiles, accepting their presence.

He thanks Jarvis and goes and sits on the couch, careful not to disturb Phil or spill his newly brewed drink. It's sweet, not nearly as bitter as what he's so used to. The chocolate is a nice touch. It makes it run across his tongue, thick and warm and comforting. With each sip, he enjoys it more.

The sun is well on its way to rising now, but Techno just lies there, head tipped up against the back of the couch, legs kicked up onto the ottoman a foot or two away. Until the Avengers call on them to do something, he doesn't plan on moving a *muscle*.

Unfortunately, that plan doesn't last long.

There's the soft noise of a breeze behind him. He frowns — none of these windows open, and the air from those odd vents above hasn't kicked in yet. Setting his coffee down and turning around, he's met with—

He's not sure what it is. With bright red skin and a metallic body, it floats up from the floor, ghostly and grotesque. Techno's hand is buried in his inventory within *seconds*, fist curling around his sword, throwing it up into the air. It flies forward, and he grabs the hilt at the last second, swinging it through the world and cutting through the invisible dust around him.

He kicks off the back of the couch and leaps to the ground, sweeping his blade right into the bright red humanoid's lower abdomen. Though, instead of embedding itself there, it sinks through, sluggish and slow as if the thing is hardly affected. It seems to affect it at the very least. A moment later it gasps, its feet hovering several inches off the ground as it flies backward, a crackling flame erupting within its gut and then extinguishing a moment later.

"I must ask that you stop fighting," says Jarvis suddenly, and Techno's heart slams in his chest as he's startled away. The red thing lets out a groan, sinking down to the floor on one knee, clutching a part of its material that has begun to turn a deep, ugly brown. "Technoblade, this is Vision, one of the Avengers currently in reserve."

"What in the world is he doin' in here!" Techno cries, throwing his arms out and narrowly missing hitting the other man — Vision — again. "I'm just sittin' here, drinkin' my coffee, and some big old red guy comes flyin' out of my floor, Jarvis, what do I even — how do I respond to that?"

"My—" Vision starts to stutter, lifting himself back up into a standing position, waving one hand very weakly in Techno's direction. "My apologies, Mr. Blade. I— I only meant to come and welcome you into the tower. I do admit that my idea of boundaries is still slightly stunted. If you'll — er — manage to forgive me. I'm only a few months old."

"A few—" Techno's neck cracks with how fast he moves to look at the ceiling. "Why do you two have the same voices?!"

"Vision was created from a temporary data sacrifice of mine. I was disabled until Sir was able to recover my backups. He now exists as a vibranium synthezoid—"

He's cut off when there's a noisy groan from behind the all. Techno turns to see Phil, waving one hand weakly in the air, shuffling around in his spot.

“Th’ fuck’re you all doing?” He whines, shoving his face into a pillow so that he doesn’t have to see them. “M’ tryna’ *sleep*.”

Vision sighs. “Respectfully, Mr. Craft, it’s 12 in the afternoon—”

“You— shut the fuck up!” Snarls the aforementioned Mr. Craft angrily. His hand trails across a few of the pillows around him before it fists into one, and he sits up, throwing it in their direction. Then, when realizing who he’s just hit — Vision, of course, Techno had dodged — he gains an incredulous expression. His hair is all moussed up and raggedy, his cheek red from where it lied on his arm, his eyes still marred with bags, as impenetrable with sleep as ever. Techno just snickers. It’s a familiar sight, and he’s grown to love it. “Who the— Who the everloving fuck are you, mate?”

“My name is *Vision*,” says the poor synthezoid, who Technoblade has begun to feel a little bad for. *L L L* is his chat’s response to that line of thinking. “I only wanted to come here to say hello and welcome you both. But, unfortunately, I think I may have—” he winces. “-been a bit presumptuous in my welcoming. What is your sword *made out of*?”

His sword? Techno flips the blade around one-handedly. He watches it move. Its gold-inlaid netherite shaft, the handle that his hand has grown so used to, the rope wrapped around the end. He looks back up at Vision and shrugs — not because he doesn’t know, but because it’s not like netherite is *that* hard to get.

“S’ Just netherite,” he says lamely, before shifting the blade back into his inventory, letting it seal up behind him. Vision’s distinctly pained expression turns to one of even more curiosity.

Under his breath, he mutters. “But I’ve never felt pain like that before. Not really.”

“Actually— If I may interject,” says Jarvis from above. “It seems that it may... not, actually, be what you call netherite? At least not in this universe. A short scan of your weapon reveals it to be *Vibranium*.”

Techno stares. He looks back at Phil. *Phil* stares.

“Vibranium is one of the rarest metals to have been currently discovered on planet earth. It’s most well known for its ability to collect, store, and release kinetic energy. While it is the rarest known metal, it is also the strongest known metal,” Jarvis explains, his voice erring on the side of cautious. “Which means you currently have an entire sword of a metal that only appears in one place on our entire planet, and presumably have more weapons — as Mr. Craft demonstrated yesterday.”

For a moment Techno and Phil just continue to stare at each other. Phil’s the first to break — his face contorting as a snicker falls through his lips. Techno goes second, letting out an actual laugh.

“You can’t be serious,” Phil giggles, though it’s clear Vision and Jarvis are. “Have none of you ever gone to the Nether? It can’t be that hard!”

For a moment, they just... Laugh. Chuckling at each other at the absurdity of the situation. But Vision and Jarvis remain silent, they turn to stare at them confusedly.

Finally, Jarvis pipes up. "Do you mean some form of underworld?"

Techno snorts. "I mean, kinda. It sure looks like one — but nah, the Nether's just th' Nether."

"Well I'm afraid to tell you that we haven't got anything called a nether in this world, Technoblade," says Jarvis, sounding genuinely sorry about it too.

For a moment, Techno isn't sure how to process that.

He shifts his weight around, musing the idea of losing the dangerous realm he's visited so often. At first, it seems trivial. What's the big deal? Does it truly matter that there isn't a Nether — or a corresponding realm? Does he *need* such a place? Does he—

Does he *belong there*?

Does he not belong, somehow, to the heat and the darkness of the Nether, where his heritage comes from and his lineage was born? Is it not a betrayal to dismiss the home of his forefathers, where long-dead bastions of old religions and dead Gods *still lie*, gold waiting for someone to return to it? To *tend* to it?

It hits Technoblade, all of a sudden, that by becoming entrapped in this new world, he's leaving behind his birthplace. In a way, he's leaving a part of himself in his empire, lost, ostensibly *forever*.

The smell of smoke and brimstone and the ringing of bells slips through his mind for an instant, as lost as he feels. Visions of swimming lakes of lava and of the people that his blood *belongs to* crawl up to his eyes like ghosts, singing mournful songs of prayer to things they've all lost for good.

He realizes belatedly that the ringing in his ears isn't truly there — but the chorus in his mind singing for blood and for return. The sound of his name being called snaps him from what feels like a trance, as he stands there, pale and ghostlike despite being surrounded by the living.

"I'm ok," he replies softly, as the world comes rushing — churning, breakneck, sickeningly fast — back, his vision at once tunneling and then expanding in seconds, revealing Philza, standing before him, hands planted on his shoulders. His friend's face is painted with concern, his brow twisted as he lifts a palm and presses it into Techno's jaw, holding his face so kindly it burns. "I— I'm alright, Phil."

"Lost you for a moment, mate," says the avian with a warm, worried voice. A pang of anxiety flips through Techno when he sees that Phil's wings are shuffling nervously upon his back — because *he* did that. He lost himself to his chat and to his memories and to the Nether — which he hasn't even lived in for *years*. Phil must sense his anxieties, though, because he frowns, tapping Techno's cheek chastizingly. "No. Don't do that."

“Do what?”

“Blame yourself for your own panic, Techno.” Phil’s hand slips away — and though he wants to chase after it, to tuck it into his own, to press it to his heart, he lets it go. “I won’t let you.”

He lets out a heavy breath and nods. The sword in his hands is gone, lying down on the couch, discarded. Vision is nowhere to be seen, and the lights are dimmed, and Jarvis is silent. It’s *peaceful* — no matter how much chaos rages in his mind, the memories he relives threatening to overtake him. Phil makes no more attempts to touch him or move closer, satisfied with standing there, a foot away, waiting for *Techno* to make the first move.

“I had them dim the lights,” he says abruptly. “And Vision left. I didn’t know if you’d be ok with him here, so I just asked him to go.”

A thick, shaking sigh rushes through Techno’s chest as he thinks of the emotions that had coursed through him when Jarvis spoke. He can no longer feel anything but the memories of anger, and of grief, and of *hate*. But they were there, violently raging through his chest.

“You should’ve gone, Phil,” whistles out of his lips before he can hold it in. The avian’s face hardens.

“Absolutely not, Techno. I’ve known you long enough. I’m not leaving you just because you panic a little.” But then Phil smiles, doing a little bounce of his ankles and knees. He winks. “Besides — bold of you to assume you could beat me in a fight, you shit.”

“Alright, you old man,” Techno chuckles, ignoring the indignant noise he’s gifted in return. “C’mere. Let me show you how to use the coffee machine.”

—

Phil takes to the machine even faster than Techno. Unfortunately, this means he has to dismantle it to figure out how it works — something that Jarvis says is uncannily Stark-like. Apparently, Phil isn’t the only idiot inventor who refuses to leave something alone until he knows how it works.

Once the coffee machine has been thoroughly dismantled, it must be rebuilt. Neither Phil nor Techno knows what half of its components are called, used for, or made of, though, so this proves slightly difficult. Techno ends up coming over and helping out, growing incredibly helpless as time goes on and they have absolutely no idea what to do with it.

All good (or slightly broken) things must come to an end, though. Despite their lack of any breakfast, time passes quickly, and noon quickly approaches. Vision never returns and Jarvis only speaks when spoken to. Overall, it’s nice. Just Techno and Phil sitting on the floor, pouring over an instruction manual and trying to figure out how the coffee machine works.

Eventually Jarvis’s voice sounds down from above once again. “I’m sorry to interrupt,” he says, sounding mildly amused, “but Mr. Stark needs to speak with you. There’s certain information he needs to gather to be able to give you temporary citizenship of... This planet, I suppose. If you would enter the elevator, I’ll take you down to the lab.”

“Do we really need citizenship?” Phil mutters breathily, Techno watching fondly as his friend tries to jam a screw into a hole that is far too small. “Fuck.”

“It’s SHIELD protocol to give every temporary earth citizen some form of identification so that, if it becomes necessary, they can be identified.”

“Or captured, I’m sure,” Techno says lazily. But he stands anyway, because at least it makes sense. Phil gets up a moment later, twisting his back around and glaring at the wicked cracking noise it lets out. “Sure. Send us down.”

The elevator is still an odd adjustment. He isn’t as confused about it as Phil, that’s for sure, but it still mystifies him a bit. Water elevators are so commonplace back home — and in the Nether, elevators hadn’t existed at *all*. Neither of them presses a button as the doors slide shut, but the light over the door starts to decrease as they go down, down, *down* into the tower, shoulders pressed together.

It occurs to Techno that the process of receiving citizenship might not be wholly pleasant. Proving one’s existence can be a tricky task — and he would prefer not to be *experimented* on. But he is, above all, a diplomat. (Or he knows how to be, even if he prefers to be incredibly abrasive.) He’ll do what he must, so long as it doesn’t come at the expense of his or Phil’s safety. And if it does?

Well. The Avengers would not like to be around to find out.

There’s a ding as the elevator slides to a stop. Phil doesn’t flinch this time. Techno just grunts. Then the doors before them slip open, the soft sound of metal against some unknown material appearing with it.

Outside is a long, open corridor. It diverges into large open rooms and doorways, people dressed up in professional-looking clothes and labcoats wandering about. They don’t look over at Techno and Phil. Not at first. Their eyes are too occupied on the sterile white tiles beneath them or the clipboards fisted between their hands on the screens they tap on, glasses glowing white to reflect it. But, little by little, their attention is caught.

Some slow down to watch as Techno steps from the elevator first, but he glares at them so they quickly wander away. Some whisper as Phil comes to his side, wings twitching nervously upon his back. Techno shifts so that his friend is behind him, trying to hide the avian from the hunger in the people’s eyes as best they can. Both of them have experience with being *wanted*. But Techno knows how someone passing look might feel like a cage, to Phil.

“Alright! Alright, stop gawking!” Says a voice down the hall abruptly, accompanied by a few claps and several startled gasps from the workers walking around. There, standing in the doorway of the largest room, is Tony, hands on his hips now that attention has been called to him. It’s like Phil’s wings and Techno’s tusks and their odd appearances are entirely unimportant, Stark taking up all of their world despite the fact that he’s only dressed in an oily t-shirt and jeans.

It makes sense. The man seems to command attention when he wants to and sink away from it when he doesn't. Everything about him is prepared — from the goatee on his chin that had been scraggly yesterday, groomed today, to the sunglasses perched on his nose. He leans further out of the doorway and snaps at Techno before the elevator, nodding. "You two. Cmere, let's get started."

"Don't snap at me," says Techno once he's waded through the sea of people around, standing before Tony.

The man just grins and beckons him into his room. "Alright, Pumbaa."

The place they're led into isn't exactly a *room*. It's more like a *house*. The walls are lined with desks and tables and booths and benches of all sort, some of them messy, others clean. Holographic blue light spills up from the biggest table — a platform in the middle, scattered with red and gold and black hunks of metal, along with a small box with a bright blue circle of light within it, with the label "*Proof That Tony Stark Has A Heart.*" On an empty side wall sit massive clear cases, more of those redstone and iron suits within them, coming in all sorts of colors. Red and blue and black and silver and anything else between, with designs ranging from hulking and massive to thin and skintight.

In the middle of it all, leaning up against a raggedy old couch, is Stark, smirking over at them as he spreads his arms. Techno suddenly realizes he's donned a very awestruck expression and covers it.

"What the *fuck*," says Phil, mystified. "What the fuck?"

"Welcome to the lab, men," Tony replies mischievously, before he moves off of the couch and sits at the main table in the lab, tapping a few things on the hologram projected before him until the blue lights have disappeared. "Come, come sit."

There are two other stools across from Tony at the table. Techno sits, tucking his arms into a folded position and smiling as he watches Phil meander over, attention caught by every single bit and gadget in the room. Finally, though, he sits. Or — rather, he trips on his own two feet and manages to fall into the chair.

"So." The man before them sags over, placing his elbows along the table and then placing his chin on his hands. From close up, Stark looks... vulnerable. Human, Techno thinks, in a way he doesn't from far away. His eyes are dark and ringed with bags, the crystal blue shade of his irises a deep contrast from the skin around them. His hair is messy and short, badly cut, as if he's done it himself despite being an actual millionaire. A craggy scar of a smile appears on his lips, teeth just peeking through his grin. "I need some basic info to be able to turn you into real living people who exist on planet earth. I might need'y' to repeat some stuff you've already told me for Jarvis's record, so sorry about that."

From beside Techno, he sees Phil raise an eyebrow, letting out a dubious sort. "What sort of information will y' be needing, mate?"

"Well." Tony leans over again, spinning a hand around in the middle of the table. A small square of light consumes his hand for a moment before he pulls it away, and a smattering of

words forms. “This is a normal human id card.” It swivels around to show them.

At the top, in bold lettering, are the words “New York State Identification Card.” There’s a generic photo of a man’s face and a name, along with what is presumably *his* sex, birthdate, and address. There’s also an indication that he is some unpleasant-sounding thing called an organ donor. It even has his *expiration date*?

“Does that say when you *die*?” Techno blurts, pointing at the spot with disgust. “And— donating your insides?”

“No— no,” Tony lets out a cackle. “No, it’s when the ID expires. You have to get it replaced. And organs are only donated once someone is dead.”

“That’s *barbaric as fuck*,” Phil whispers. “*Metal*.”

Tony raises his eyebrows and chuckles at this. The false ID card spins around and then sinks back into the metal surface below them. When Techno places his hands upon it, it’s cold.

“Alright, Jarvis, you ready to file all this down?”

“I’m never not ready, sir,” replies the AI smugly. Tony waves a hand up toward an unidentifiable place on the ceiling with a *bah* of dismissal.

“Ok-ok-ok-ok— You first, Blade. Name?”

To his own embarrassment, Techno has to pause and think before he replies. “Technoblade.”

Tony nods. “Right, I’ll turn it into Techno Blade.” Before Techno has time to protest, he turns to Phil. “You?”

“Uh— Philza Craft. I jus’ go by Phil, though—”

“Eh, nicknames don’t go on official documents.” Tony tilts his head, considering it, then points a finger over at Phil with a shrug. “Unless you want that to be your name?”

Phil shakes his head, looking over at Techno as if he’s just as lost as the other hybrid is.

“Right. Moving on! How old are you?” He looks at Techno first.

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Techno shakes his head free of the noise and snorts. “That’s an uh... complicated question. Y’see—”

“We’re sorta broken,” Phil finishes. “I mean, like— I only have one life, but I can’t die by old age. And Techno... Well.”

“Technoblade never dies,” he says, his turn to finish the sentence. He shrugs. His chat has begun to scream about that fact, over and over and over. He does his best to tune it out, even

as Tony gapes at them, looking utterly confused, adding to his chat's excitement. "I think in like... Human-y years, we're probably around our twenties. Right?"

Looking over to Phil only provides him with a snicker and a shrug. Turning back around to *Tony* provides the opposite results — what looks a bit like *horror*.

"You're— you're young enough to be my *child*," he blurts, though he seems to greatly regret it a second later, groaning. "You're practically *children*. Who gave you swords?" Tony demands, only sounding like he's half kidding. "*Who gave you swords?*"

"We... forged them?" Techno replies, his eyebrows shooting up in confusion. For God's sake — some of the people on the SMP had been teenagers. Their ages aren't that odd. Phil had been traveling the world for years before they found each other. Techno was fighting practically since *birth*. Swords feel natural in his hands, armor a familiar, comforting weight on his chest. But to Tony, it's as if he just said they were about to stab him through the chest.

"And we're not *children*," Phil retorts, crossing his arms. "We're probably older than you. Like we said — in human years, we're probably around our twenties. I don't even remember how long I've been alive."

That doesn't help anything. Tony just continues to stare, with his illustrative eyebrows raised and one hand creasing into the wrinkles on his forehead as if he's rethinking life.

"...Sure," he says finally, sighing heavily into his own wrist before he pulls his hand away. "Yeah, scribble it down, Jarvis. Now: How tall are you?"

It takes a while to get all the info down. For obvious reasons such as their complete chemical makeup being different from a human's, neither of them are allowed to be organ donors. It still sounds unpleasant, anyways. Tony groans in frustration when it turns out that Phil is his exact same height and Technoblade happens to be towering ahead the both of them by 2 feet, making him 7'3". Tony has to explain why having bright red eyes isn't a normal thing. It's all a very long and — in Technoblade's humble opinion — arbitrary process.

But after around an hour of building them a portfolio of mutant — not hybrids, because hybrids apparently don't exist here — relatives, job experience, medical records, and even political opinions, they're done. Of course, Techno still has no idea why it's all important by the end — as does Phil, apparently.

Eventually, *finally*, it's over. Tony tells them they'll have official government-assigned IDs, passports, birth certificates and social security numbers within the week. Apparently, they'll even have something called a credit card — which means they get unlimited amounts of "American" currency that they don't have to actually earn or pay off! So... Small triumphs!

That's when Techno finds out it isn't *really* over, though. Which is irritating because he's genuinely curious about watching Phil put that coffee machine back together — but Tony tells them both that medical records are *important*. Techno doesn't really get the need for vaccines — he's survived this long, hasn't he? — but Tony stresses that they'll probably just die if they don't get them.

“Especially if you’re going to be living here and working with us, we need to make sure you don’t — yknow, conk out over some bullshit like *scarlet fever*. We won’t do them all in one day. Just a little at a time to make sure the moment you step outside you don’t explode.”

“Why would diseases make us explode...?” Techno asks petulantly. He knows it’s a turn of speech — but watching Tony groan again is very funny.

After this, they’re led into a room a few floors down. It seems to be some sort of high-tech medical wing, with all sorts of flashing lights and beeping noises, screens displaying numbers and letters and terminology that neither Techno nor Phil could hope to understand in *their* lifetime. The medical staff seems less interested in them than the people upstairs, though, which is a small mercy. So they’re just led into a separate room where all of the overwhelming smells and signals and *sounds* are scrubbed away, mercifully quiet.

“Alright,” Tony says pressing his palms together. “Are you two going to go nuts if I let some strangers in here to poke you around a bit? They’ll explain what they’re doing, and Jarvis’ll always be there to explain if something goes wrong.”

“I’m personally not comfortable with any of this, but you staying certainly wouldn’t help,” Techno says dryly. Phil, whose wings have been mantled defensively behind him for the past few minutes, manages a snicker.

Tony rolls his eyes and waves a hand like that’s the most offensive thing he’s ever been told. “Whatever you want, Napoleon,” he says, which is yet another reference that goes sailing right past Techno’s head.

The moments pass quickly. Two people dressed in clinical white labcoats enter the room and introduce themselves. They sound kind enough — but Techno knows better than to trust so quickly.

The cold metal of what’s called a stethoscope brushes against his chest as they measure his *heartbeat*. A small light is inserted into his ears and then his nose, which he greatly protests, until they do it to Phil too and he just sneezes. The same happens to Techno, and his chat mocks the noises for several minutes. They hit both Techno and Phil’s knees to test their reflexes — which are *great*, fuck you — and though Techno has no issue, the avian beside him clutches his knee and hisses, rubbing the sore spots once the doctors turn around.

They ask several questions about their mental state such as “do you ever feel suicidal?” or “do you ever feel as if you are not the only person in your head?” and several others, to which most are stamped with a big fat *yes*. When Techno brings up his chat and the doctors try to probe him further, he just shrugs and says something about how *he* doesn’t even know what they are, not really.

Then come the dreaded *vaccines*.

Two twin trays of syringes are brought out, sat next to Phil and Techno. This is when it starts to go wrong.

Now — they’ve both had to have injections of things put into their bloodstreams before. Just potions — though he’s sure that all the drugs people out there love probably work the same. Sometimes if an injury is too deep or too complicated a steady line of health or regeneration or even weakness might be necessary.

Vaccines are different. The risks of the tiny vials of liquid are explained at length. Techno and Phil may both feel violently ill or even *die* in the next few days — but he knows they’re built different and it won’t be the latter. But still, they’re daunting. And, when Techno looks over, Phil has begun to shake.

He knows his friend’s history with this sort of clinical, “it’s for your own good” manner. With experimentation and risks and his own *health*. Having only one life has always been something of a curse when other people look at it, but Phil has always worn it as a badge on his sleeve, for better or for worse.

Phil is an anomaly. Winged, with one life, eternal Angel of Death. When others get curious, and Phil falls, it all goes wrong.

The first injection isn’t bad. Techno takes a deep breath and sighs through it, frowning when he realizes it doesn’t hurt at all. The doctor beside him smiles, complementing his strength. Phil seems to be doing just as fine, even if he closes his eyes as it needle slides into his shoulder.

The second injection isn’t terrible either. (Still, Phil’s shaking hasn’t improved, and so Techno reaches out a hand, letting his friend clutch his own. The avian smiles warmly at him, not even noticing as the shot enters his shoulder.

It’s the third one when it all goes sideways.

Techno has as little issue with this as he had with the other. He just relaxes his arm and stares stoically forward, squeezing Phil’s hand encouragingly as the tiny blade sinks in, and then pulls out. It’s only when Phil doesn’t squeeze his fingers together in return that Techno realizes something is wrong.

The doctor attending to his friend has stepped back, a confused frown breaking through the soft and mellow expression they’ve held thus far, warm brown eyes narrowed in concern. Phil himself has hunched over, a single clawed hand rising, sliding over the spot where he’d just taken the vaccine, shaking. It’s only when he lets out the first, rattling gasp, that Techno realizes he’s been holding his breath.

“A- are... We done?” Phil rasps out, his limp hand sliding from Techno’s grip as if he doesn’t even notice it’s still there. Concern immediately fills Techno’s chest, and he slips from his seated position, moving to stand in front of the doctors, crouching so that he can see through the soft blond wall of hair his friend has formed over his face. Beneath the shroud, Phil’s eyes are wide, pupils blown, staring not at him, but a memory. His lips are bitten and red, short, anxious breaths heaving out every few seconds when he can no longer hold it in.

“Yes, sir— Are you— are you alright?” Asks one of the doctors. She steps forward, holding one gloved hand out. Techno is sure that she means well.

Still, he whips around, smacking her hand away with an animalistic snarl. Her eyes widen and she gasps, moving away and then clutching her wrist to her chest. A frightened expression crawls across her face.

But to Techno's surprise, it dissipates, replaced by a nod. There's no anger on her's or the other doctor's face. No judgment, no retaliation, no punishing blow. She just looks... *sad*. "My apologies. Yes, you can both go now. Please make sure to return to The Avenger's floor so that they may help you if you have an adverse reaction. Have a good day."

He nods. *Blood, blood, blood*. Dismissing the voices is easy enough. The doctors make way for him as he moves forward. Touching Phil's wings right now would be dangerous — so he just places a hand on his partner's shoulder, gently guiding it forward. The avian's breath hitches and stutters as he slides from his seat, one hand pressing into the armrest as he tries and fails to steady himself.

Phil nearly falls. Techno is there in an instant, tucking an arm beneath his friend's back, far below his wings. In a moment of clarity, the man looks up, crystal blue eyes watery and face pale, and he nods his thanks.

After that, Phil leans on Techno's side, his smaller body fitting perfectly in front of the piglin hybrid's arm. Dizzily, heavily, Phil walks in time to his steps, the two of them starting out of the room. The shallow up and down of his friend's chest makes something protective and strikingly *sad* run through Techno, and he runs his hand over the man's back, making a soft, rumbling noise in the back of his throat when a frightened whistle of a thing falls from Phil's.

"You're ok, Philza," he whispers, as they make it back to the elevator slowly but surely. "It's all done. It's done. You're ok."

They're paid no mind as they cross the room, deliberately ignored as Phil stumbles, ragged breathing loud and painful sounding. Techno's always there to catch him, anyways. And, after what feels like *hours*, his own vision swimming with hate and anger and *worry*, they make it to the elevator.

"We're here," Techno mutters as the doors slide open, and Phil steps in. A cool breeze flutters through his hair as the air above clicks on, the platform beneath his feet unmoving for now, solid and grounding.

Finally, Phil seems to let go. He slumps, letting out a soft, fearful groan of a thing, sliding down to the ground with Techno's help. It's now that the elevator's doors close — as Phil drags his knees to his chest, slipping into the corner of the elevator, cheek pressed to the metal as his eyes flutter shut, a rough keen slipping through the teeth biting down on his lips. Techno crouches onto his heels before Phil, placing one hand on the man's chest and sliding another forward to let him hold. The avian takes it gratefully.

For a moment, Techno is lost, unable to figure out which buttons to press or what to do once the elevator doors open. Then, from above comes Jarvis's voice, softer than ever before.

“No one can open the elevator until I unlock the doors, Technoblade. Is there anything I can do to help in this moment?”

“Like— Like what?” He stammers, listening to Phil’s breathing grow weaker and weaker as his panic grows, his ability to hold on waning.

“I read off the weather and the time and the date for Mr. Stark. Mr. Rogers has me turn up the heat in his room. Mrs. Maximoff likes Sokovian lullabies playing when she gets this way.”

Techno nods, even if his chest is still tight. He’s at a loss at what to do — even though Phil had helped him so *easily* earlier. Now, here is his friend, curled up on the ground, and he’s staggering around here, utterly useless.

“Let the air flow, please. And— and don’t let anyone else know we’re here. Make it cold. *Way* colder.”

The air instantly turns a touch cooler. Techno bristles in it, but he knows it’s for the best. Creeping slowly forward, he cautiously tugs his hand off of Phil’s chest, twisting it instead around to curl about his back. The man suddenly tips forward, legs sliding to the side as his head hits Techno’s shoulder, soft breaths puffing onto his shirt. “You’re ok,” he says, as he pulls Phil into a strong hug, holding him close, pressing his cheek into the side of his friend’s head.

A soft, protective rumble goes through his chest, startling even him. But there’s no one around to comment. To ask him to stop, to glare and to scoff. So Techno just leans forward, letting the painful whistle of Phil’s breath sink into his shoulder, chest rumbling against the avian’s as he clutches at his back for dear life.

“M’ sorry,” mumbles Phil after a few minutes of lying there, curled up in the cramped elevator. “I’m—”

“Hey hey hey,” Techno says with a frown. He curls one hand around the back of Phil’s head, scratching softly at his long blond hair. “No. Nope, Philza Craft, you do not get to blame yourself for your own panic,” he parrots, remembering his friend’s words from the morning.

The repetition startles a laugh out of Phil. He snuffles as he rises slightly, pushing back on Techno’s chest until they can look each other in the eyes. “F- fine. For you, mate.”

“For me,” he echoes once more, a smile ghosting his lips.

When he’d told Phil he’d give him the world, he meant it. The world and the stars and the End and the Nether, too, if he could. There’s no judgment as he lets the man take his hand, pulling him up off the ground. Phil slides back into his side, one shaking wing crawling out to cover both of their backs. Phil is, in some ways, his world. They’ve been what little each other has for years now, alone otherwise, everyone Techno has ever loved already dead and Phil’s wife being *Death*. It makes for a complicated dynamic. But there is *nothing* he wouldn’t do for his partner, and he knows that Phil thinks the same for him.

“Do we really need to go to the communal floor, Jarvis?” Technoblade asks the ceiling a bit desperately. “Is anyone else willing to just let us sit in their livin’ room or something? S’ not like we’ll be noisy.”

There’s a long pause. Then Jarvis returns as the air in the elevator grows gradually warmer again, the frigid chill from before dissipating.

“I believe the only Avenger currently unoccupied is Vision, sir. I’ve already asked him and he says he would be more than willing to accommodate you for however long you need.”

Techno winces at the mention of the Avenger he had actually just straight-up *stabbed* that morning. Even if it hadn’t actually physically wounded him, Techno reasons that going around and stabbing people never makes for a good impression. But, with one look at Phil — pale, tremors shaking through his entire body, soaked in a cold sweat — he makes a decision. This isn’t about him. It’s about giving his friend the privacy he deserves.

“Ok. Take us there.”

Chapter End Notes

PHIL AND TECHNO ARE ANTI MASKERS REAL NO CLICKBAIT

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Here's a bit of a fluffy, shorter chapter! Plot/messiness shall pick up soon, I just think this was a good transition point. Enjoy!

(This is barely edited and its almost 3 am. Excuse any typos.)

When the elevator doors open, Vision steels himself for an aggressive greeting. It isn't that he has anything against Technoblade — he *is* genuinely sorry for his sudden entrance into the upper floor. He's even more sorry about the subsequent panic the other man was put through. Therefore he wants to try and make amends.

This is certainly not what he had been expecting. Technoblade is beside Philza, the two of them clutching each other's hands like it's the only thing keeping them tethered to the ground. The winged man is shaking, pale, hair sticking to his skin with sweat, though his expression is determined. Technoblade looks stoic — but there's clear worry in his eyes when he looks at his friend.

“Come in,” Vision says warmly, gesturing to his suite. It's large and grand and typically co-inhabited by Wanda, though she's been sent to therapy, leaving it empty for the foreseeable future. The decor is warm and homely, cultivated by the two of them, designed to reflect a home *they* need, together.

To his surprise, Philza takes the first step within. Technoblade follows second, his expression shutting down the moment his face moves past the elevator, his nose twitching in discomfort. Vision watches as they survey the room, all subtlety thrown out the window as they search for exits, uncaring about him, standing in the middle of the room.

“Would you be more comfortable if I assumed a more human form?” he asks politely. The atoms of his form warp and twist and suddenly, hair falls gently into his eyes, his body growing to fit a more realistic suit of skin. Both Technoblade and Philza jolt.

“How th' fuck d'you do that?” Asks Philza, voice a bit hoarse.

Vision smiles. He is rather proud of that trick and all it entails — even if having a flesh-suit is utterly normal to anyone else. “Nanotechnology. I'm able to shift my appearance as I like. This just happens to be what I most prefer.”

The two stare at him for a long time. The silence is *weird*, and so Vision sighs, slipping the oven mitts off his hands — that he only really uses for aesthetic, anyways — and setting them down on his kitchen island.

“I was going to make lava cake if you two would like to help me. Of course you’re certainly welcome to sit and rest —” he gestures at the loveseat before the television, loaded with blankets and pillows as it is. It’s a bit messy, but that’s the curse of cuddling, he supposes. “But if you would like something to eat, or to keep your minds on, then I am more than willing to provide.”

“You—” Technoblade’s nose wrinkles upward and he gains a rather disgusted look, wincing. “You put lava in a— in a *cake*?”

“That would *destroy it!*” Philza cries, sounding a little out of it, as if he’s half asleep and trying to explain a dream. “Y- you’d burn all the insides and you- you wouldn’t even be able to eat it, who puts lava in a fucking *cake*—”

“*No*— No, I can assure you that lava cake has no actual lava in it,” Vision replies, chuckling. How little do these people know about this world? Lava cake and vaccinations and vibranium and elevators — what sort of place have they come from? “Lava cake — or Moelleux au chocolate, in France specifically, is a chocolate cake with melted chocolate inside. So, when you cut into the cake, chocolate spills out.”

“What the *fuckkkk*—” Philza says, dragging out the final syllable. His expression warps from concerned, to shocked, to *intrigued* as he looks up at Technoblade, grinning shakily. He nods vigorously, though that just seems to put his expression right back at *nauseous*. “I want it.”

“Mmmm... Chocolate,” says the taller man dryly. Though his face betrays no emotion at first, the wickedly fanged grin he gives to his friend is enough for Vision to confirm his suspicions.

“Right. Cake making it is.”

He leads them to the kitchen — making no comment when Philza immediately slumps over into one of the stools at the island, wings lowering as their weight seems to physically increase. “I only have these two aprons,” he says apologetically, pulling out the flowery printed one Wanda prefers and then his own, a kitschy gag gift from Clint that reads “I like to get high” and then “quality ingredients” beneath it in much, much smaller lettering.

“I want the drug one,” Philza says immediately, and Technoblade lets out a single chuckle as he’s handed the floral one while the other man snatches Vision’s out of his hand with vigor.

They tie their aprons and get ready, washing their hands and tying their hair up. Philza’s goes up in a messy, lopsided bun, Technoblade’s in a heavy ponytail hanging down his back. It’s clear to Vision that neither of them has really ever baked much before — because every utensil he pulls out pulls a gasp from between them.

“Can one of you preheat the oven to 400 while I get the ingredients?” He asks, turning around to rummage through the cabinets. There’s no affirmative — but it’s a simple enough task that he doesn’t question it. When he turns back around, though, he finds Technoblade staring blankly at the stovetop, hovering a hand above it while Philza squints at the buttons above. “Oh- My apologies. Hit the button that says bake and then type in the number 400.”

Even that apparently proves difficult. It takes a minute of Technoblade tracing each button before he figures it out, with a scoff and a shake of his head, clearly slightly embarrassed. The same sort of thing happens when Vision asks them to get eggs out of the fridge or to grab some ramekins from the upper cupboards.

Neither of them knows what a ramekin is, so Philza pulls out a strainer and pretends he knows what he's doing until Vision gently corrects him. He has to spend ten minutes explaining how a refrigerator works, and in the end, they just scoff, telling him that if the tower was in the arctic, they wouldn't even *need* a fridge. When Vision explains that if they lived in the arctic, they would need central heating and therefore a fridge for cold foods, he is forced to explain the concept of heating, then air conditioning, then *ventilation systems*, which Philza has apparently been incredibly confused by for several days.

“Look— I'm just *saying* that using highly experimental chemicals to store yer food sounds like a recipe for disaster,” says Technoblade, hands on his hips. Philza snickers loudly behind his arm.

Vision lets out a dramatic groan and sets the last of the ingredients on the island, pouring over his cookbook one more time. “Alright. I'll let you win this fight, so long as you start working.”

“*Fine*, ” he replies, with a heatless snarl. “What first?”

The fact that melting the butter to line the ramekins is the step they must begin with sends them into a whole discussion about what microwaves are and why they apparently *also* do extremely dangerous things to their food.

“Why not just use a fire like a normal person!” Philza cries, nearly knocking his own wings into the open microwave door as Vision reaches in to get the now-melted butter. “It works just as— Oh, wow.”

He's cut short by the *appearance* of the material, now suddenly liquid. Philza's knees bend, his wings fluffing up and rising above his head, head tilting to the side and his eyes going owlishly round — making him look distinctively birdlike — like a chick watching another chick learn to fly. His eyes widen even *more* and he reaches one hand up, tracing the bottom of the clear measuring cup on Vision's hand.

“Ow— *fuckin'* hell,” he hisses, yanking his own hand away when the hot substance touches his skin. “How come you can hold it?” He demands, angrily glaring up at Vision, still crouched, nearly cutting his very small height in half.

“He's made out of netherite, Phil,” Technoblade drawls, taking the cup from Vision's hands with a nod, pressing the brush for the butter into it and swirling it around. “Netherite doesn't burn.”

“Why can't *I* be made of netherite,” grumbles the smaller man, unfolding his body to watch curiously as Technoblade starts spreading the butter around the ramekins. The brush seems disproportionately small in his massive claws, but he wields it like a practiced artist, gently running streams of melted butter down the inside rims of the containers.

While that gets done, Vision busies himself with brushing the leftover liquid onto the necessary parchment paper. It's easy enough — even for him, as a beginner — and repetitive. Just a simple brush of the liquid against the paper, over and over again, the soft brown parchment getting darker as the warm butter mixture coats it.

Philza volunteers to start boiling down the liquid materials over the stove. Vision is hesitant to delegate that task to someone who didn't know what a fridge was until three minutes ago — but he succumbs when he sees how ridiculously excited the man is to try it out.

He sets up the water bath for Phil — because he calls him Philza a single time and it makes him cringe so hard he sneezes — and gives him the materials and instructions. Technoblade helps survey the process, switching off to help stir every few minutes. Vision just watches them work while he mixes the dry ingredients, letting them do their work.

It's... endearing, in a way, how they go about things. They stir at first with both hands and dangerously vigorous, but quickly realize how messy that becomes and readjust to a better posture, a gentler speed. Phil stirs for a few minutes while Technoblade suggests new ways to do so — fold it over, scrape the sides, etc etc.

They work together for an incredibly simple one-person task, splitting it evenly between the two of them while Vision does his own job in another corner of the kitchen. Sure, they get plenty of chocolate smeared on themselves and the burner, but when they do, they assess what they did wrong and they make sure they don't do it again.

Soon enough, both of the two mixtures are finished. Phil pours the two together and then Technoblade pours it all into the ramekins after Vision has finished stirring, biting his cheek in concentration, tusks moving slowly as he worries his jaw. Then, they let them sit in the fridge — which Technoblade starts eyeing with enough curiosity that Vision gets a little worried for the safety of his kitchen appliances — and go to rest, as the stove continues to slowly preheat.

Vision slides down into the cushions of his favorite armchair without noise, his body floating into it as gently as ever, arms landing on the pillows as he sighs. Philza practically tosses himself at the couch, lying facedown on the seat and groaning into his own arms, wings flapping once, twice, before they fold on his back, shuddering. Technoblade follows in pursuit of comfort, draping his own legs behind Phil's on the couch, long arms sliding across his thighs self-soothingly, head tipping back and eyes sliding shut.

“Are vacc-seems supposed to make you tired?” Yawns Technoblade, not even moving a hand to cover it as his mouth stretches wide and a loud exhale falls from his lips. “I'm... so exhausted.”

“M' too,” mumbles Philza, though it's greatly muffled by his arm, smushed into the eggplant purple pillow below his head. “I fuckin' hate needles. And doctors.”

That strikes Vision as a little odd. He shakes his head, elbows planting on his knees as he fixes the two with a doubtful expression. “Please, explain to me how you have doctors in your world, but not fridges, or microwaves, or ramekins.”

“Or cake made of lava,” adds Technoblade helpfully. Phil’s head turns only about an inch to the side, but Vision can see the absolute murderous rage in his eyes even without seeing it on his face.

“They weren’t real doctors, you fuck,” he explains, snarling with no real heat behind it. “They were — no, why am I even explaining this to you?”

“Because I’m only a few months old. I’m naturally curious, Mr. Craft.”

The two of them groan in tandem, thrusting their hands into their faces to hide the smiles that lie there. For whatever reason, Vision finds himself smiling as well.

There’s something oddly endearing about the two. He doesn’t quite understand it — they’re newcomers in a space he has occupied since being born, they have no apparent use, and they’re *messy*. Sort of like a pet cat, he reasons, before frowning and scrubbing that idea from his brain entirely. He’s endeared by them — but it’s certainly different to the way someone would be endeared by a housepet.

Startled out of his thoughts by Technoblade clearing his throat, Vision turns to find the man looking right at him, eyes steely and serious. For a moment, he sort of thinks he might get run through the abdomen again, and he braces himself, getting ready to phase through a sword or an axe or a—

“I shouldn’t have stabbed you.” His voice is raspy, hesitant, but he clears it again, nodding along to his words as he becomes more sure. Vision looks back up, slightly surprised by the admission of fault. “And— you’re not creepy. Not — *bruh* — I mean when you’re red.” he waves a hand, gesturing to Vision, skin still pale and peachy and human. “I was just... startled.”

“Which is certainly understandable,” Vision replies, feeling a swell of happiness bubble up within him. It isn’t often that someone accepts his original form. There’s always something left desired with the uncanny — and that very rarely lines up with his ideals. “I appreciate the explanation, Mr. Blade.”

To his surprise, the man groans, knocking his head against his hands. For a second he thinks he’s done something wrong — but then Technoblade looks up at the ceiling instead of over at him, whining.

“Jarvis, can you just like — introduce me as Technoblade?” He rubs the palms of his fists into his eyes tiredly. To the side, Phil has just begun to laugh, hanging his head to his chest and hiding the snickers — though not very effectively. “Everyone here is so *formal*, for End’s sake I go by *Techno* half’a’th’ time.”

“Certainly, Mr. Blade,” replies Jarvis pleasantly with the exact tone and inflection as Vision’s own speech. He lets out a soft and distracted chuckle when the other man lets out another groan, Phil telling Jarvis to “*fuck off*” with another heavy giggle.

There isn’t much time to wait for the lava cakes to chill, but Vision doesn’t rouse either of the men when it becomes time. They’ve started nodding off, Technoblade’s bleary eyes flickering

shut as he stares out the window, Phil tossing and twisting on a nest of pillows as if unconsciously constructing a bed. He just stretches out of his seat and silently crosses to the fridge, letting them rest.

Neither of them notices when he slides the cakes into the stove — not even when there's a soft clatter as they hit the rungs. A timer starts on the dashboard without his interference, the instructions for their meal in Jarvis's database already. He nods upward without vocal acknowledgment, allowing the men behind him to rest.

They're already almost asleep by the time he returns, the cakes completed, filling the kitchen with the warm scents of chocolate and sugar and butter, all warm and soft and comforting. Vision's proclivity for cooking has not been greatly improved since birth — and Wanda often has much to say about his spices — but his collaboration with these clueless newcomers must have triggered something within him.

"If you would both join me, I believe the cakes are finished," he murmurs. They both still startle despite his quietness, but quickly settle when they realize who it is, letting out twin groans that slip through the air in harmony. "Apologies."

Phil throws a pillow at him once again. Then, when realizing that he might've knocked over the cakes, his head appearing over the couch, panic and red and freckled. Vision, who has learned from his first experience with Philza and pillows, sidesteps, while Technoblade lets out a convulsive laugh on the couch.

"Enough'a that, Phil," Technoblade says as his chuckles taper off, sitting up on the couch and rousing himself with a sleepy tug to his face. Philza gives him a glare but is tempted too greatly by the appearance of the tray of lava cakes, settled on a nearby coffee table. He slips off the couch and scoots forward to sit next to it, ignoring the raised eyebrow he's gifted in response.

The two stare ponderously over the ramekins as if they've been personally offended. Vision settles on an ottoman beside them, picking a spoon up from the table and cutting into the cake, the melted chocolate spilling out and onto the metal.

This immediately spurs Philza into action, though Technoblade still stares down at the dishes warily. Picking up a spoon and dipping it in, Phil laughs out loud at the way the chocolate drips down the curved surface and all over the cake.

"It really is like lava," he says softly, pressing one blackened fingertip into the liquid and pulling it away with a hiss when it's revealed to be too hot. Then, lifting the spoon to his mouth, he takes a bit, leg bobbing up and down against the ground as he takes a moment to consider the taste.

Then, he freezes.

It's like some sort of chemical reaction goes off in his head, a lightbulb flashing in his eyes. Phil's mouth goes wide, and he lets out a noise almost comparable to a coo, before his face contorts into a wicked grin, another bite shoved between his fangs.

“Holy fuck,” he says, sounding breathless as he takes another bite, and then another. His shoulders hunch as he leans over the bowl and moans. “Holy fuckin’ shit, Techno, you have got to try this.”

This is the only thing that seems to get the other man’s attention. He smiles fondly, leaning over to pick up his dish and spoon. He considers it for quite a lot longer than his companion, but evidently, his curious wins out. Techno dips his spoon into the cake and hums before he takes a bit, brow creased with concentration.

“Oh, *what?*” He says, astounded, as he pulls the spoon away and stares at the cake. “No, what— *huh?*”

Vision laughs at the almost childlike display. “I assume it’s a success?”

“It sure is *somethin’*,” Techno purrs, his voice a low, happy rasp. Tail swishing behind him despite his seated position, he shuts his eyes and nods, clearly pleased.

It’s interesting to watch — in a way completely separate from clinical or unfeeling interest — as the more animalistic parts of Techno and Phil come out as they get more comfortable. Tail untucked and swishing, wings a flurry of happy movement, soft purrs behind Techno’s voice, something like a chirp at the end of sharper words when Phil speaks.

As far as Vision has been able to see in his limited times of knowing these men is that when not in this state, they’re closed off. Deeply protective of each other and quick to startle, violent when a threat is posed. Curiously enough, anger doesn’t seem to provoke the winged or tusked parts of them to rear their heads. Technoblade had been angry, of course, when Vision had risen through the floor. He hadn’t growled or snarled or grunted though — outside of human comprehension, that is.

But here he is now. Open. Unashamed, at least for the moment. Perhaps it’s the fact that Philza is with him. Perhaps he’s just never been able to be treated to good food. Neither ideas are pleasant to think of.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

hehe

There are rules, in Avengers Tower.

Rules about where they can go and what they can do and even sometimes what they can *say*. Neither Phil nor Techno technically exist yet, SHIELD still configuring the details of their life. It's suffocating. They can't speak to anyone new, can't leave a very small group of floors. Phil enjoys the floor he's so gracefully been given, but he knows a gilded cage is no better than a rotted one. They can't make any calls. They can't try to contact anyone outside of the tower. They can't become violent at any time — not even to spar, and not even with each other. If any sort of conflict is kicked up, it is to be swiftly and immediately extinguished.

It feels a bit like his childhood. Being kept in an enclosed space, intended to be used *eventually*, but only once his use is found. Given the occasional luxury only for the dignity of it all to be stripped away, wings bound, stuck in an empty promise.

That's the worst part. *Wings bound*. Phil is not allowed to fly.

He's not allowed outside and nowhere that he is able to go in the tower is large enough for him to fly in. His wings must be registered with SHIELD as what they call a mutation, and that can't be done until he *legally exists*.

It's an issue for Techno as well, but Phil takes the brunt of it. His wings must stay at his back, unused, unpreened, uncomfortable.

It isn't that he can't clean them. He has, in fact, finally learned what a shower is — even if he was slightly scared of the concept before it was explained, as, embarrassingly enough, he has been for all of the new concepts he's had explained to him. It's a heavy rain of whatever scent, temperature and color he wants, along with soaps and utensils and everything else. It's *bliss*.

But being able to preen is a whole other devil. Being able to preen is having autonomy over his wings and his feathers, fixing crooked vanes and pulling away broken rachis. Phil once kept up maintenance constantly — but after years, the task has become a burdened.

(Technoblade preens his wings, when he notices that they've gone into disrepair. Phil doesn't dare ask for that luxury.)

Without the ability to fly, preening feels virtually useless. Why should he care? Who's there to help him, to ask about the dirt stuck in his feathers and the uncomfortable itch between his wings?

The Avengers seem to be trying to be as accommodating as they can (or as they're willing to be.) They're not rude or combative or even argumentative when Phil whines about being unable to fly — a desperate question hidden behind his petulant words. He *wants*. Wants more than he ever has — or that's how it feels, stuck inside, burdened by crooked feathers and bloody vanes, twisted about in a labyrinthian maze of plumage that he cannot use.

Tony Stark likes to ramble about how wonderful the sky feels and how good it will feel when Phil is finally able to return to it. But he knows the man only knows a fraction of what Phil does — he will never feel wind in feathers that don't exist and he will never brush a palm against the dirt as a risky dive comes to an end. Thor and Vision seem to make an attempt to empathize as well but it isn't to *any* avail — because Phil has *wings*. Phil is an avian. Flight and wind are in his blood, no matter how rare the heavy appendages upon his back may be. Phil was born for flight, and to suppress that is to kill the most essential part of himself that makes him *him*.

Phil and Techno learn what showers are. How to use a washing machine, a dryer, a dishwasher, and a radio. Jarvis tells them what things such as cameras and cellphones and cars are. In return, they explain the mechanics of guns and planes back on their homeworld — which the AI and his creator ferret away with great excitement.

For a short while, it's as if their job is only to sit there and talk about the most trivial parts of their lives. The Nether and The End. Planes and guns and Strongholds. SMPs and Admins and Commands and all sorts of bullshit that is common knowledge for them. Some of the ideas seem almost normal to the Avengers — and then they ask something stupid like: "In a video game?" or "what sort of tech did it use?"

It's as if their very concepts are familiar yet unreal. Phil and Techno are known to each other — but what does that matter, when they exist in the bubble that is the Avenger's perception? No one else in this frightening, foreign world has ever met them.

Vision is kind to them. Startlingly so. Even his friend, Wanda, is as well — though she's clearly much more paranoid than the netherite synthezoid. That's not to say Phil and Techno aren't paranoid as well, though. Wanda has a *smell* to her.

In all honesty, most of the Avengers do. Techno senses it first. Bruce Banner smells of ozone and the sort of scent that comes from Nether — angry and hot and broken. Wanda Maximoff is much less a scent and more a *feeling*. An oppressive weight when she looks at you. A heavy feeling of being *known*, and of knowing that you won't always be.

That doesn't matter very much. She shows Phil what nail polish is, so it's not like he can be mad.

His fingers and nails are already a jet black, clawlike material. They shine in the light, just another hallmark to the fact that at heart, he is more avian than human. But Wanda gives him a small jar of slick, pungent-smelling black polish, and it all falls apart.

Techno paints it on his hands for him. Phil's own are shaking too badly with excitement to do it. Afterward, he paints Techno's a blood red, the two of them admiring each other as the crimson and obsidian polishes glint in the light.

It's a diversion. Phil knows it. The polish, the kindness — it isn't that Wanda would be so giving or Vision would be so kind if they didn't want something. If they didn't want trust and compliance and *wings*, bound so that he might only use them when the Avengers need them.

For a while, things are ok. His wings itch and hurt and are uncomfortably stiff, unable to be stretched and folded and used at will. Technoblade is antsy, quiet and anxious and quick to snap at anything that presents any sort of threat to either of them. But things are ok because they *have* to be and because neither of them has the energy to keep on fighting.

A gilded cage is a gilded cage. It's still gilded, though, and that's worse than a broken one. And so, things are alright.

That doesn't last forever.

It starts on a perfectly normal day — or as normal as normal can be, when you're two foreign entities in a land you've only occupied for a week or two. It starts on a day with a routine all the same as all the others. Perhaps that's more accurate.

They wake up early in the morning, roused by nightmares, tangled in each other's grips on the couch. They still haven't dared to migrate to the bedrooms. From there, they use the coffee machine and eat nothing, unable to work past the drowsiness in their heads and the nausea in their chests. Jarvis asks them a series of simple questions and they answer, the rhythmic pounding of repetition beating against their door. He tells them the agenda for the day: they follow it.

They're sent up to the Avengers communal floor to discuss their knowledge, same as any other day. But it's all a circle now, every question the same, every answer firmly restated. They aren't *asking the right questions* — but Phil and Techno don't even know the right ones.

Tony Stark is the one who talks to them the most. Nick Fury — the head of the organization SHIELD — tentatively works alongside him. Occasionally, other Avengers will step in. Bruce Banner with questions about portals and eyes of ender and the mechanics of their world. Steve Rogers with another drawling story about how he too is a man in a world alone. It's all painfully repetitive.

Phil is alive and real and breathing. So why does he feel so *empty*?

So caught up and captured by a sense of numbness, the world around him far too new to be real. So unable to move, to fly to breath to *live*, stuck in a beautiful and futuristic cage with latches far tighter than they ever have been.

Technoblade has begun reading Pet Sematary. The books a little dramatic, but it's been a fun read this far, as Phil's friend reads it out, reenacting scenes with a cold and monotone voice. Phil himself stands at the windows wrapping the room, observing the city below him, the rain

slowly pelting the buildings. The floor has been rather empty today, leaving Technoblade comfortably curled on one of the couches, free of the obligation that eyes give him. Phil has been restlessly staring at the sky for the better half of an hour, but his partner's steady voice keeps him from panicking. Keeps him *grounded*.

The elevator doors slide open with a ding. It rings about the room and Phil startles, Technoblade going silent, the two of them facing the person making an entrance. It's just Steve, walking calmly into the kitchen, strides long and heavy and powerful. In some ways, he reminds Phil of Techno. In other ways, they're damn near opposites.

"Morning," he says after a long moment, finally reaching the coffeepot and the leftover coffee within, black and steaming. Steve waves a hand in a one-fingered wave, returned only by a brisk nod from Technoblade before he returns to his book, no longer reading out loud. It's hard not to resent Steve for the interruption, but Phil grunts out a greeting anyways.

For a moment, everything is silent. Phil turns to face the skies, scanning every falling leave and every gust of wind, kicking up all the air down far below. He can almost feel it in his feathers, brushing through his wings. It's so *close*. And yet—

He's startled from his wishes by Steve clearing his throat, setting a mug down on the table before him and glancing back at the half-full coffee pot. "Do either of you want some coffee?"

"Mm... Naw," Techno mutters, flipping a page in his book, squinting at it. Techno has always had trouble reading anything, but he's persistent enough in getting through books that he can clear novels in hours. It's endearing, the way he's forced to shove his nose into the books, tusks nearly brushing up against the pages. He gets incredibly surprised when Phil walks up in front of him, not noticing him, so absorbed in any matter of book. Now Phil just thinks he needs glasses. (It's still cute anyways.)

"Sure mate," Phil says on the contrary, though he doesn't make a move from his spot at the window. In fact, he moves forward, pressing his clawlike fingertips to the glass. The sun has risen, only the last hues of golden light peaking out from the oppressively grey clouds. The windows have begun to smear into watercolor blurs, the lights and colors all about him spreading into multicolored smudged rainbows.

The sounds of coffee being made fills the room as silence presides over their voices. Sugar and milk and creamer and caramel and all manner of things, stirred together, spoon clanking against two twin ceramic mugs.

He loses himself to the sound of rain pattering against the windows. It's begun to speed up, falling faster and faster, rivulets of water streaming down the glass. If Phil was flying, it wouldn't be dangerous, his wings adapted for harsh winds and heavy storms. He thrives on lightning and thunder, in fact, chasing that space above the clouds where everything is silent and dark, water streaming through his wings and hair, clinging to his skin as he freefalls for a single moment.

Snapping away from his thoughts, he's handed a mug of coffee, pressed into his loose fingers with an accompanying chuckle.

“It’s dreary out, isn’t it?” He asks, taking a slow sip from the coffee, stormy grey eyes reflecting the storm building outside. That’s something Phil genuinely likes about the man. He’s not as fast as the rest of the modern world. He drinks his coffee slowly, savoring the taste and the heat as if he isn’t used to either. It’s the same way that Techno and Phil focus on each and every privilege they’re given, stuck in another, more grueling time.

Steve came from the past. Phil and Technoblade popped out of a brutal old world. They’ve got many things in common, no matter how different they are as well. It’s nice to know that they aren’t alone.

“Sure,” he replies, shrugging, eyes glazing over and following little streak of rain, imagining them as birds on the horizon. “I like the rain.”

“I can tell.” Steve chuckles, pressing one palm to the glass and then swiftly pulling it away, sensing the cold.

Wings ruffling on his back, Phil sighs, glancing back at the broken and unpreened feathers. “Jus’ wish I could go out in it.”

“Fury wouldn’t let me out of the SHIELD helicarrier for about three months. I was stuck there, sweepin’ recruits off the mats and hoping that they’d be able to give me back my old life.” Another long sip of his coffee. Steve spaces out into the rain, same as Phil. “It won’t last forever. You’ll be able to fly soon.”

They’re surprisingly kind words. Phil looks up from his drink, dark eyes flitting across Steve’s face. There are worry lines cut across his skin, deep bag beneath his eyes that one wouldn’t see if they weren’t looking closely. If they weren’t looking directly *for them*. But Phil sees — sees what is shared in his own face. Somehow, Steve is far more similar to him than he ever could have expected.

“Just don’t be too worried about it,” says Steve after a long pause, accompanied by a soft chuckle and another sip of his coffee. His vision narrows back in as he looks at Phil, a smile stretched across his lips. “SHIELD might end up having to tie your wings down if you get any more hasty.”

The rain slides hastily across the windows. Phil’s feet are solid against the floor, his hands wrapped around the steaming hot mug of coffee he’d been handed. And, for a single second, he’s still ok.

Then the words hit, and coffee spreads against the grain of the wood, splashing across his legs, the ceramic shards of a broken cup — How did it break? Where has it gone and who broke it and *where is he* —

“Oh,” Steve says, as if nothing is wrong, as if he’s said nothing done nothing wrong. He sets his mug down and he frowns at Phil, brow carelessly knotted. “You ok?”

Technoblade says something in the distance. But Phil can hardly hear it. All he can hear is his own song, all he can feel are his feet upon the ground as he walks away, vision swimming,

bare feet tracking through the glass. All there is to be known are the ropes pressing into his wings, the rain pounding behind him.

“I’m fine,” he says roughly, staggering to the elevator. For a single second, he’s within the tower, watching as Technoblade steps toward him, as Steve looks on in concern. But there are still ropes chaffing his feathers, blood flowing freely from torn and broken and ruined skin. He knows it’s only memories, and for only a *moment*, things are ok.

But then the memories slip back over his throbbing vision, his hands shaking violently as he steadies himself against an unknown wall, and he enters the elevator, and he knows nothing else.

—

The doors shut with a click. The room hangs foggily with a heavy atmosphere, the walls buoyed down with the weight of the tension as Techno stands fully, towering above Steve in a way that is both metaphorical and far too real.

The captain doesn’t stand down. He plants his feet, staring at the spot where Phil just vacated the room. There’s only confusion in his gaze, no hatred nor anger or anything else. But *still* — a mistake has been made, and Techno’s head screams for *blood*.

Steve blinks, gaze foggy and distant. Technoblade is sure he doesn’t know what he’s done — but he’s far past trusting ignorance, and so he takes a single step back, stares, and—

Crunch.

Steve’s nose shatters, blood spewing from the broken bone, a strangled roar of pain erupting from his lips. He stumbles backward just as Techno turns to leave, chest heaving as he stares back at the elevator, surely empty by now.

“What have you *done*,” he snarls, planting a hand into the captain’s chest and shoving him, uncaring of the crimson dripping off the man’s chin and onto the floor.

“I— I don’t even *know!*” Shouts Rogers, face adopting a defensive expression. He throws his hands up, blood a freefall waterfall spreading all around. All Techno can see is red — beyond the blood, beyond Steve, beyond the tower. It pounds behind his eyes, chat screaming for him to *listen*, to *act*, to *kill*—

“Sirs,” interrupts Jarvis from above, jarring static in the face of what he is faced with. “I must interject to alert you to the fact that Mr. Craft has now left the tower’s premises and begun to fly.”

The whole world freezes at the words. Techno looks out the window, hoping to see his friend — met instead by a vicious storm. Rain pelts the glass, over and over, hurling itself down from the heavens and breaking the whole world apart.

Phil is gone.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Technically this isn't a double update since I'm posting this at 1 am :>

Spiderwebs stick when it rains. They get wet, sure, just like everything else, but the water remains, heavy dewdrops clinging to its frame, never quite ready to drop. Perhaps they'll burst, splashing against an unwitting spider nearby, not realizing just how close to danger it perches.

Peter is a little different.

He slips through the city, heels skating through puddles, his webs never collecting enough water to collapse. Skyscrapers slip past as he flings himself away from every one, suit slick with moisture as he looks for any crime that might need *busting*. The storm seems to have quieted a large amount of activity, though, because for a long time, he is alone.

Karen and the rain are the only ones to keep him company. The occasional shutter of a camera or shout of his name ring out, sure, but other than that, Peter is alone in the skies. After all — not many people in New York can fly like him, right? Not unless they're an *Avengers*. All of which he knows are currently *preoccupied* and also not engaged in *patrol work*. They leave that to the small fries. Like Peter. Who is currently the only person outside who should be able to fly.

Key word — *should*.

The rain breaks for a single instant not far ahead. There's a black, winged smudge on the horizon, the sun disappearing behind its body. Great feathers flutter up and down wildly, caught in the wind, clearly unable to properly hold the weight of their owner. For a single second, they're *flying*.

Only for a second. As soon as the moment ends, the winged thing drops from the sky like a puppet with no strings to hold it up, the rain crashing against their back as they spiral. Peter squints and can make out long, thin arms, legs not even kicking as they freefall, an impassive face with eyes unconsciously shut, neck thrown back.

Lightning strikes in the background. The body explodes with the color of the electricity behind it.

Peter springs into action, throwing himself towards the man in the sky with a soft “*woah—woah—*” panicked and quick and slipping between his teeth. He slides his arms

under the form just as they hit the ground, able to scoop the shorter being up and break the fall, skidding on his heels.

Upon closer inspection, the winged person seems to be entirely human — save for the wings on its back. Startling blue eyes reflect his own, thready and soaked blond hair caked to a heaving jaw, quick breaths panted out from between the man's hypothermic-blue lips.

They jerk out of his hold with surprising strength, getting to their feet and staggering away, deeper into the alleyway they're currently in. They don't get far, though, their legs jerking to the side and then folding beneath them, a short yelp cut off as they fall to the ground.

"Hey— hey, man, slow down, ok?" Peter says softly, hands up and pacifistic, stepping closer. The man jerks backward, one wing struggling upward and shrugging over their face, their hands tearing into the dark black feathers with an awful sound. "O- oh. Ok— I won't get closer. Are you ok?"

To the opposite of Peter's surprise, the man remains silent. Silent as he can be, against a backdrop of still-pounding rain, their heavy and frantic breaths all that can be heard. He's learned to be patient, over the years it has taken for him to learn how to fight. So he only stands there and waits for the man to move again, not making a sound.

"They're gonna kill us."

Peter startles. The man uncurls with a weak cough that is best described as a bitter, frightened giggle. His face is frantic, eyes wide and hands tangled into the ropey grey strands of hair hanging from his skull.

"They're gonna kill us," he murmurs again, before he lets out a pitiful moan of a noise, bloodshot eyes rolling back and forth with paranoia. "Gonna— mate, you— you need'ta go, they'll kill you *too*—"

"Hey, no one's killing anyone," Peter says softly, finally creeping closer, given no reaction to his proximity. Finally, he's able to shift onto his knees, looking the man directly in the eye. No recognition is gathered. "But... uh, just out of curiosity, who would be doing the killing?"

"The Avengers," gasps the man, and Peter recoils at the thought, immediately going to argue back, when — "SHIELD. Fury — I— I don't know, *all of them*. I broke their rules." His wings shuffle closer to his chest as he slumps back against the wall, knees hugged to his chest.

"Look. I— I know the Avengers, and they wouldn't kill a random innocent person."

The man lurches forward suddenly, an impassioned quality to his eyes. "That's the *issue*," he warbles thickly, as if desperate to get the message out. Water trickles into his eyes and into his shirt and yet he doesn't even seem to care, unblinking, unflinching. "I've done something wrong to *them*. I wasn't supposed to, and now me an' Techno are fucking *dead*—"

Now, Peter has no clue who this Techno person is, and he has no clue why he's only just finding out about the Avengers apparently having connections to a large bird man. It's the

first time he's hearing about *any* of this. But he knows compassion, and so he just nods sympathetically, trying again.

"They can't find you here, sir. Here, I'll even— *Karen*, switch off all of the tracking devices currently attached to the suit — save for the ones at the deepest level." He turns back to the man. "Now the Avengers won't be able to find us. Not without a fight."

For a long moment, the man stares into the eyeholes of his suit, silent. It's as if he knows exactly where Peter's soul lies. It's intrusive. It's *weird*.

"Is Karen like a Jarvis?" He asks hoarsely, head turning mechanically to the side with curiosity.

Peter lights up beneath the suit like a smashed christmas light. "Oh yeah! You know Jarvis? He's the original, Mr. Stark made me Karen for my suit and— and—"

He cuts off when he sees the man's face sour, jaw twisted up and brow knotted with worry.

"Oh. Right," Peter replies. "Uh. No Avengers."

"Th- thank you."

He tries to think about what he can do in this situation. He's got a panicked and frazzled bird-man cornered in a random alley, far away from his normal patrol route. He'd only been this far from Manhattan to visit a friend, and now he's almost hopelessly out of options.

He's not far from his friend, though. Hell's Kitchen is right around the bend.

So he moves backward, thumbing his chin and considering the idea. The bird-man stares at him distantly with glazed eyes, still shivering, skin a frozen pale color.

"Say. How do you feel about getting out of this rain?"

The man nods. He stands at Peter's request a moment later, letting himself be supported by the teenager's hand beneath his shoulder. They hobble out of the alley that way, the unidentified bird-man sluggishly limping behind him, still obviously unrecovered from what seems to have been a panic attack. Peter can certainly sympathize. He's got enough unresolved childhood trauma to last him a lifetime.

"So," Peter says, trying to make casual conversation as the man's feathers drag across the ground and the rain beats harder. "What's your name?"

"...Phil," he says, slowly, as if it hurts his throat to release the words. He clears his throat and looks up to Peter, a weak grin twitching at the edges of his thin blue lips. "An' you?"

"P— *aye*, ok not that one — *Spiderman!* You can call me Spiderman," he replies, wincing at his own terrible impulse. He doesn't know why he wants to answer with his real name, but the man seems too miserable. He's sorta pitiful. And Peter wants to help the pitiful. Or rather — Spiderman does.

After 20 minutes of trudging through the rain (Peter doesn't think it wise to tug a possibly injured foreign man through the skies right after he'd fallen from them) they finally make it to Daredevil's apartment.

The enigmatic Devil of Hell's kitchen is just that. Confusing as hell, extremely self-destructive, and also one of Peter's closest allies (and friends!) Peter really doesn't know how he's going to react to having a giant winged man in his house, but he hopes that he at least doesn't start throwing punches.

"Al-right," he mutters, slipping his arm out from under Phil's shoulders. There's intensely defined muscle rippling under his button-down, but at the same time, Peter can feel that he is extremely thin. He frowns — but it's none of his business, and so he just steps forward, rapping on the front door. Daredevil has probably known they're coming for the past ten minutes, but Peter likes to be *polite*, ok?

"You'll like this guy. He's nice. But— but he's a little scary when you first meet him, so uh— try not to. To—"

"To what?" says a gravelly voice as the door opens, accompanied by a yawn, which stretches on for several seconds.

There stands Daredevil, Devil of Hell's kitchen, the most feared vigilante for miles around, wearing a bright purple sweatshirt with his hair completely ruffled out of place. He runs a hand down his face and sighs at Peter's lack of answer, scratching at the stubble beading his chin.

"Why did you bring a—" he frowns, cocking his head to the side to study the figure before him blindly. Phil does the same. Peter gets the distinct impression of two confused birds. "A *wing-man* to my apartment?"

"Wing man has a name," croaks Phil, finally able to stand fully by himself, just behind Peter. Suddenly, he realizes that the man seems to not be protecting himself, but *Peter*. They've only just met, but it seems the strange man has already started becoming fond of Peter, just as the boy himself has in return. "You're blind."

A brief pause. "*And?*"

Phil shrugs. "Just wonderin' if you still want a hand shake or whatever. Since you seem to be able to sense this shit."

An even *longer* pause. Matt raises one suave eyebrow down at Phil, clearly aware of the toothy grin the exhausted man is sending him.

"Fair enough," he replies finally, shrugging. "No. I don't think hand shakes are necessary. What *are*, are explanations." Now he turns to *Peter*, who shrinks back, waving sheepishly. "Spiderman. Why is a bird man on my apartment steps?"

"He... looked lonely?"

“He looked lonely,” repeats Matt, massaging the bridge of his nose. When all hope seems lost he drops his hand, sighing with exasperation and waving them inside. “Sure. You vigilantes sure do love to adopt random people.”

“You’re a vigilante,” Peter points out.

“I’m a *villain*,” Matt corrects. “The media still isn’t over last week.”

“The media’s always harping on us for *everything*,” he complains right back, walking into the apartment. “Man, I swear, Jonah is *obsessed with me*.”

“He probably is. Just a little.”

Peter turns around, expecting to see Phil following close behind. Instead, the man is still in the doorway, one clawed hand holding onto the grain, a suspicious expression etched into his face as he surveys the room. It doesn’t take long for it to become clear what he’s looking for. His eyes scan the windows, and the doors, and Matt’s back in the distance. He’s looking for escape routes.

“Does your new friend like scotch?” Matt calls from in the kitchen, peaking his head out the door. He waves a glass around, quirking his eyebrows as if he notices that Phil startles violently when he says it.

“No— no I don’t. I don’t drink with strangers,” he replies a bit testily, finally creeping inside. It looks like he regrets letting Peter lead him anywhere at all.

“Good choice. No drinking in front of kids.” Phil doesn’t strike Peter as the type of person to abstain from drinking in front of children, but he doesn’t say anything — for his own sake.

Instead, he moves to the middle of the room, clicking the latch on a lamp and letting the soft yellow glow fill the room. He settles on the couch and beckons for Phil to follow, patting the soft cushions next to him.

Matt’s house is minimalistic. His furniture is soft, a little oddly mismatched in color and fabric. There are few light sources, and not many dishes, and the soaps in his bathroom are all completely unscented and mostly natural. Even so, Peter thinks it’s one of the coziest places he’s ever been — save for his own home.

Phil joins him on the couch. He sinks into the pillows, looking distinctively startled as they attempt to consume him, fingers pressing into the fabric. He pats them — once, twice — before he lets his hands delve deep into the plush fabric, a grin spreading across his face. Deep from within his chest, almost like a cough, he makes a low *chirp* noise. Peter can hardly stifle a smile at the sight.

“S’ a lot different than the tower,” he murmurs wistfully, fingers curling into the fabric.

“Oh, you live in the *tower*!” Peter exclaims, snapping as several pieces fall together. It all makes so much more sense now. Phil looks at him like the info should be obvious. “I mean—

Mr. Stark has got a lot of properties, so I dunno, maybe you lived somewhere else, or like— with SHIELD, or Nat or something, or—”

“I have a feeling you’re confusing the man,” says Matt, startling Peter back into silence. He snorts, setting a tray of drinks down on his table and then settling into an armchair, groaning as he’s forced to flex his back. “Right,” he continues, head tipped up to stare at the ceiling, never focusing on anything. “I believe you owe me some introductions.”

Peter makes to start. But, in an eerie change of events, Phil steps forward first, as if ordered to do as Matt is told. He gets it — Daredevil can be an intimidating guy, but he’s wearing a purple hoodie and he has a bright pink butterfly clip in his hair right now. That can’t be *that* scary.

“I’m Philza Craft, sir,” he says, though his voice sounds exhausted as he leans off the couch, running a hand through his hair.

Matt grimaces. “Eugh. Not— Not a sir. Just call me Matt.”

“But— Spiderman calls you Daredevil?”

Matt’s head snaps up, cracking loudly. He looks directly at Peter with eyes so full of rage that he sort of wants to cower away — but the moment he does, Phil’s expression sours, and he leans forward, shifting an elbow in front of him. It’s... concerningly sweet. Peter appreciates the gesture, but Matt would never hurt him. He’s not even sure why Phil is so worried in the first place.

Thankfully, Matt must hear some imperceptible change in the man’s heartbeat, because he settles, relaxing his face into a lazy smirk in Peter’s direction. “I thought you knew better than to reveal people’s secret identities, *underoos*.”

“Hi, I’m Peter,” he squeaks out, quickly turning to Phil and nodding. He does *not* want Matt repeating every awful nickname Tony likes to call him. “Just Peter nothing else nope just— just Peter. Peter!”

He’s given a *very* critical look for his troubles. When he pulls off his mask, though, Phil’s facial expression practically *explodes*.

“Aw man,” Peter murmurs, running a hand through his hair and attempting to dispell the terrible mask-hair he always gets. “I’m not that ugly, am I?”

“That— that isn’t your *skin*?” says Phil in return, not at all what Peter would have expected.

“No- no, man! Why would this—” He waves the mask around with a quirk of his brow. “Be *skin*?”

“I don’t know! This is a really fuckin’ weird world, mate! I thought Tony Stark’s suit was made out of redstone and shit.”

Matt laughs — even though Peter 100% knows that he has no clue what redstone is. (Or 99% sure — Daredevil does routinely fight evil zombie ninjas, so there’s no telling how far his

knowledge reaches.) Phil looks a bit lost, but he chuckles too, wavery and nervous.

The room devolves into what might be called a comfortable silence for a bit. Phil's wings extend behind him, the feathers brushing the ground behind the couch, a badly-disguised sigh of relief going through him. Peter fidgets with his fingers and takes drinks from his cup, looking between Matt and Phil every once in a while, anxious to see what his friend thinks of the avian.

It's hard to tell when Matt is studying someone if you don't know his tells. The man has mastered the art of lucrative manipulation, hiding every bit of his curiosity behind the facade of a clumsy blind lawyer with a big heart — a stereotype that Peter knows is far from correct, but which Matt routinely uses when he needs something done.

He cocks his head and his mouth goes slightly ajar, tongue resting just behind his teeth. His eyes tend to flutter about, reflexes following without any stimuli. He'll smooth his hands over his knees and tip his gaze to the ground as he listens and thinks and deduces his opinions, unwilling to share them until he must.

"So, Philza." Matt's whole body seems to unfold, as lithe as a cat. (Or, perhaps, a serpent. Peter doesn't think he'd appreciate that comparison.) "Why did you come here?"

The man in question stiffens, his wings slowly inching back toward his back. It seems like an unconscious mechanism, feathers pulled taught to his body, a weary smile spreading across his lips.

"I... someone said something worrying to me. Something I couldn't risk happening. I panicked, instead of getting Technoblade, which would've been the *logical* thing to do, but I'm shit at logics, and he doesn't have wings, so I just— I ran."

He hangs his head, plunking it onto his palm, a flush of shame covering up the formerly pale and frozen pallor of his skin. To Peter, the story sounds almost unreal. He can't imagine any of the Avengers threatening Phil's wings — they already seem so precious to him. But Matt must sense something that he doesn't, because he only nods.

"What did they say?" He asks, and his voice is so soft it almost startles Peter. At least it seems they're on the same page on their inexplicable fondness for the bedraggled winged stranger sitting on the couch, slumped over, eyes ringed and as dark as his wings.

"Jus'... Threatened to have m' wings tied off," he says, dismissive, exhausted. As if that isn't anything wrong at all. "It's stupid," Phil continues with a dry chuckle. "I've nearly had my wings sliced off a hundred fuckin' times. They've been bound and clipped plenty. I dunno why it set me off."

Silence. Oppressive and dark, hanging over all of their heads, just as the looming threat must have hung over Phil's. Peter stifles his expression. There's something disgusted within him — something raw, and worried, and perhaps a bit sad on Philza's behalf. He's only just met the man, and yet, he's managed to prove far more interesting than most *superheroes* Peter meets in a year.

“You’re not from earth, are you,” says Matt, breaking through the quiet. His voice isn’t judgemental. Only curious. “At least not ours.”

Phil shakes his head. “No. No, I’m— definitely not.” Then, with a humorous chuckle: “What tipped you off?”

“Everything,” Matt replies dryly.

“Fair enough.”

They sit there surveying each other again for a moment. Phil reached forward and awkwardly sips from his glass, setting it down a moment later, like he expects one of them to knock it out of his hands.

“I just... Don’t know what I’m supposed to do,” Phil admits, after a few long minutes. He hunches over, long blond hair dripping rivulets of water onto the floor. “I— I don’t want to be hurt. I can’t let Techno be hurt.”

Peter sees the exact moment that Matt makes up his mind about what he wants to do. It’s a subtle thing. His back straightens, a furious crack coming from his lower spine for his troubles. He smoothes the knees of his sweatpants down, the fabric neat and straight across his leg. If he were wearing a tie, he’d be adjusting it.

“Alright, Mr. Craft. Do you happen to know what a lawyer is?”

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

oops! i dropped my past daredevil fixation! (is it obvious?)

He breaks out of the tower.

Surprisingly enough, Jarvis is *apparently* his new favorite accomplice. Several hours after Phil's initial escape, Technoblade gets onto the elevator to go up to his quarters and scream a little, but when the doors open, it isn't the ridiculous wealth of his room that greets him. It's the foyer.

Jarvis says nothing as he steps outside the walls of the miniature room. He hesitates. Phil hasn't been answering his communicator. He stops hesitating. He steps into the front room and he walks through a crowd of people and he waits for the ball to drop, the guns to fire, the sword to be drawn. And...

Nothing.

He walks out the front door for the first time in over two weeks, and he *breathes*.

People swim around him on the sidewalks, shiny umbrellas coated with rain. The same moisture immediately soaks him entirely, so different from the artificial shower he uses in the tower. No one pays him any mind, their heads ducked and buried in coats as they scurry about, attempting to escape the rain. It's all so much more real from outside than it ever was from the windows upstairs. He stretches out an arm and cranes his neck upward, sticking a tongue out, catching the rain in his mouth.

It tastes different than the rain he knows from home. And yet, the experience is enough.

Someone calls his name. He immediately goes on defense, hand poised to dip into his inventory, the terror that he's been found out overcoming him. He whirls around, and he wonders, — will they kill him first? Or will they make him watch as Phil falls, likely to some sort of terrible method, because it's really gotta *hurt*, hasn't it?

But then his eyes catch on a familiar form beneath an umbrella. Hands wrapped around his arms, wings bedraggled and soaking, face pale, a shiver running through him — Phil is the most wonderful thing Techno has ever seen.

They collide with twin laughs, crashing into each other and immediately creating a crushing hug. Phil's hands creep up Techno's back and clutch at his shirt, the avian standing on his toes. Techno places one on the small of his friend's back and the other on the back of his head, carding a hand through the soaking wet hair plastered all over it.

“You *idiot*, ” he growls, but it’s protective, rather than angry. “Do you know how *scared* I was?” His voice breaks halfway through as he drops his head, settling it against Phil’s own, prodding at his forehead.

“I’m sorry, Tech,” whispers the avian in return, a soft smile lifting his lips as he moves a hand to cup Techno’s cheek. His palm is cold, but it feels like it’s the most blessedly warm thing Techno has ever felt. He leans into it, still pressing their foreheads together, ignoring everyone else.

“You better be, old man.”

A laugh comes from behind them, short and childish, clearly not of adult origin. Two men come walking up behind Phil, and he looks at them with a nod, not fear. One of them is wearing a neatly pressed suit, red glasses resting on the crook of their nose and a red and white cane in his hands. He’s got a debonair, careless look to him, but the protective grip on the younger man’s shoulder tells another story. *That* one is blond, giggling still, wearing a ridiculously oversized suit. He looks annoyingly familiar. Techno dismisses his immediate comparison.

“Matt Murdock,” says the older man, lips quirking up into a fond smirk at the younger man’s behavior. “And—“

“Peter Parker, sir!” Says the second boy, pulling a hand away from his side and giving Techno a messy salute. It’s absolutely terrible form, but *whoops*, it’s maybe a little endearing. Like a duck stuck in human shoes. “We are—“

“*I am*, ” corrects Murdock, “Your lawyer. You and Mr. Watson’s lawyer, to be precise. Now — I’m here to negotiate terms with the Avengers on a much less serious scale than I would be if I were actually taking them to *court*, but they know I will expose them to hell and back if they don’t listen to me.” His smile expands. Razor-sharp teeth shine in the sun, looking distinctively *devilish*. “I’m a PR *nightmare*, sir.”

“I am too,” Phil agrees with a nod, though Techno knows his friend definitely has no idea what PR is.

“Phil—“ he chuckles, raising a confused eyebrow at the entrance of what is apparently called a *lawyer*. He pulls out of their hug, instead moving to slip one warm hand into the other’s. “Where— uh. Where have you *been*, man? I sorta feel like I’m missin’ some vital context here.”

“Context is just semantics, sir,” Matt interjects before Phil can answer, holding up a single placating hand. “And sure — the semantics are on our side here, but I think it’s best that we get inside and start raising hell against the Avengers instead of sitting out in the rain.”

It’s a good point. Matt and Peter border Phil and Techno, the four of them walking back into the tower as if they never left at all. Of course, the two inhuman characters in the room get many looks, seeing as they’re dripping rainwater everywhere — the human two had umbrellas — but Techno is sure it isn’t the weirdest thing any of them have seen.

One of the random people on the first floor must recognize someone in their group. Techno watches as they look their way, see *Murdock*, and blanch, going completely white. Their mouth opens and closes as they attempt to make words, but none come out, only a low squeaking noise.

“I hate this tower,” mutters the man in question, before he spots the frightened-looking person gaping at him. “Oh! *Klein*, isn’t it? Are you still in the law division?”

The person — Klein — just stares at Murdock for a moment more, silent, hands white-knuckling a briefcase between his fingers. He’s a tall, round-looking man, with short-cropped brown hair and a well-fitted suit. Then, once remembering that he is in fact being spoken to, he clears his throat and crosses over, nodding. His face assumes a confident grin — but it’s so fake that Techno almost has to laugh.

“Yep, Murdock. What brings you up here?” He peaks behind their little group, quirkling an eyebrow up in reasonable confusion. “With... a child intern. And a bird one. And Adonis.”

“Well, Klein. What brings me here happens to be a textbook case of the Avengers infringing on human rights. Or— in this case—” and he gestures to Phil and Techno now, making sure to catch their wings and tusks and such in his glance. “Inhuman rights. Which are still quite important, right? We wouldn’t want it coming out that the Avengers are leading a manhunt against mutants, do we? We wouldn’t want the X-Men to get involved, Klein, right?”

By the end of his sentence, Technoblade gets the distinct impression that Murdock is about to turn into a panther and eat the soggy-looking sack of fear in front of him. A smile that would once have been charming splits his face, a great chasm through his cheeks. Despite his apparent blindness, it looks like he’s staring into Klein’s very *soul*.

“*Lawyers*,” whispers Peter reverently, wide-eyed and impressionable behind the devilish figure standing before him. “What a dude.”

“I’m not a lawyer, Peter,” replies Matt, uncurling his shoulders, standing up straight, ruffling a hand through his hair. In the light, it looks to be a shade of bloody crimson. “I’m a *shark*.”

—

Markus Klein is not a rookie.

He’s been an attorney for Stark and the whole gang of Avengers around him for *years*. Ever since the Chitauri attack, actually. He’s won awards. He’s taken cases pro bono. He’s saved countless little people before he made his way into Stark industries roster of impeccable lawyers. So, what he’s saying is that he is *good at his job*.

Murdock is better.

Where Klein is fantastic at his job, Murdock is a *devil-sent*. Murdock knows how to tug all the right strings until exactly what he wants falls into place. Murdock manages to keep up a damn good yearly income while also taking a significant amount of cases pro bono. Murdock

is blind — but not to justice — and has a sappy hero's tragic childhood backstory from his youth. (Sue Markus, he grew up in Hell's Kitchen. Word gets around.)

So, when he sees god-damned (sorry, he knows the man is a catholic) Matthew Murdock standing in the lobby of Stark tower alongside a man with wings, a 7-foot tall goliath with tusks, and what appears to be a 14-year-old teenager — hey, isn't that the *Stark internship* kid? — he's sufficiently confused. And scared. And maybe even a little exhilarated because woah Murdock is sorta hot but— but that is *beside the point!*

He ends up being the one to lead the little gaggle of apparent human rights violations up to the elevator. Jarvis greets him — *and* the newcomers, as if the Stark tower's rudimentary AI already *knows them* — and ferries them all up to Markus's specific office space.

Twenty minutes later, he's in a shouting match.

“You cannot keep two living beings sealed inside a tower for the sake of *identity*, Mr. Klein!” Murdock says stubbornly, shoving his hands into the desk below him. The two individuals in question — apparently named *Philza Craft* and *Technoblade* — have been left right outside the office, sitting with the fourteen-year-old. Apparently, he's actually 17. “And I demand that you stop stalling and call down Tony Stark before this turns into an actual God-forsaken *riot*.”

He splutters. A *riot*? And did Murdock just take the lord's name in vain? *Shit*. This is not good. But *man*, is the guy hot.

—

Franklin Percy Nelson (Foggy, because he's not an asshole) is more than used to getting weird phone calls about his friend. Matt is the sort of person who got into an unreasonable amount of trouble even *before* he was a crime-fighting vigilante in sex-leather garb. So, when he gets a call from Avengers tower about the fact that it seems like Nelson and Murdock may be attempting to sue Stark industries and the Avengers as a whole over human rights violations, he's a little resigned to it.

Then he remembers that Captain fuckin' *America* is an Avenger. That's when he starts telling the taxi he's in to speed.

—

The email from Klein is a little cryptic, at the very least. Despite being the head of the law office, Simone Warren does not know what to do about the fact that the Avengers are allegedly harboring two extremely dangerous off-world probably-terrorists. She does know that the accusations are only *alleged*, because throwing around words like *lawsuit* and *criminal charges* this early in the game is a *terrible* idea.

But Klein is clearly worried, and things are getting out of hand. She knows Murdock. Tried to recruit him and his partner once, actually. They'd declined. And honestly, Simone thinks that's actually for the better. Murdock is more of a *priest* than a *lawyer*. If a priest could have fangs, that is.

So she stomps down to the lower floor offices, shuffling papers like any of them are important, and she finds Klein's office. She knows no one with clearance lower than *her* — and her clearance really isn't all that high — is meant to know about the extraterrestrial infestation in Avengers tower. So, when she finally arrives outside the doors to his room and finds a man with massive black wings and a 7 foot tall giant, she knows that something has gone very, very wrong.

"Hello," Simone says anyway, because she isn't an asshole, she's a *lawyer*. They're not entirely synonymous. "You're Philza Craft and Technoblade, I presume?"

The two share a matching glance. It looks like they're trying to decide whether they want to eat her or not. The little blonde kid next to them looks like he's only there for morale.

"...Yes," replies Philza, his wings doing a funny little flutter. He cocks his head, peering up at her with owlish, sharp-witted eyes. "And you are...?"

"Simone Warren," she introduces herself as, stepping forward and shaking both of their hands. She sets her papers down on the end table beside them and peers through the foggy windows of Klein's office. Two dark blobs flutter about within the room, faintly angry voices emanating from the crack beneath the door. "I take it you two are the reason Nelson and Murdock are currently having a shouting match in a place they almost never agree to even visit?"

"They sure are, miss!" Says the younger boy beside them. He looks almost familiar.

"And you are?"

"Peter!" He says, grinning toothily, holding out a hand. She shakes it, raising an eyebrow. Why again is there a child in the law offices? That's not usually supposed to happen. Not unless it's bring your family to work day — which was canceled *four* incidents ago. "Peter Parker!"

Oh, *fuck*.

So, not only are Nelson and Murdock and two off-world fugitives on Stark's ass, his own pseudo son is currently attempting to oppose him in the court of law. The boy must see her blanch, because he lets out a nervous chuckle, sheepishly rubbing at the nape of his neck.

"Please don't tell Mr. Stark I'm here?"

She groans out loud, slumping into a chair, rumpling her perfectly pressed suit. *Fucking hell*, she thinks. *This is going to be a long day.*

—

It's been about two hours since Technoblade went missing. Nine, give or take, since Philza did the same. There has been no news of either — save for a few photos and videos on the internet of an apparent mothman sighting in downtown Manhattan — for hours. Tony may be a coldhearted former alcoholic, but he's definitely starting to worry.

Steve told him what happened, clutching at his bleeding nose as Bruce reset it. It's a familiar story. Someone in the Avengers tower sets off someone else's unknown trigger, and things spiral. The thing is — they have no clue what triggers the off-worlder's trauma. He doesn't even think they *know* they're traumatized. Tony's throat still hurts when he remembers Philza implying that he'd been expecting to be waterboarded.

He hadn't known that the man had been so affected by the no-fly order. Now, it feels obvious. But hindsight is always 20/20, so Tony and everyone else had just assumed that Philza was just antsy in general.

He wonders what the man's breakdown implies. Steve had joked about his wings being bound — has Phil experienced that before? Goddamnit, he still needs to schedule them both for some fucking *therapy*.

The two men are like, scarily traumatized. They jump at everything. They refuse to take more than two meals a day unless forced to eat. They always sleep on the couch, refusing to part to go to their bedrooms. Any attempts to invite them to communicate are immediately snubbed — but in a way that makes Tony think they're frightened, rather than just stubborn. Unfortunately, the Avengers have a penchant for attempting to adopt fucked up idiots and then screwing it up.

What's done is done, though. There's no taking back the ridiculous oversight he'd made. It would have only been a day or two until Philza could legally go out and fly anyways, but it was still cruel of the Avengers and SHIELD to keep him shuttered away regardless.

Needless to say, he's a little bit worried. Then he gets *the message*.

"Sir," says Jarvis from above as Tony worries over a newer piece of his suit, elbow-deep in the bucket of bolts it has become. He looks up, lifting his welding mask with a nod. "You're needed in Mrs. Warren's office. Apparently, Nelson and Murdock is trying to have you fined."

This gets his attention yanked right out of the machinery. Tony nearly smacks his head into the thing in his effort to rise, looking up to where he knows Jarvis's speaker is with a disbelieving expression. "Come again, J?"

"Nelson and Murdock are attempting to sue or fine you."

"On what ground?" He exclaims incredulously. "We haven't even spoken to Daredevil in *months*—"

"It's not about Daredevil, sir," Jarvis replies, his voice distinctively almost *bored*. "It's about Mr. Craft and Technoblade."

This surprises him even more than the fact that a BDSM freak and his defacto boyfriend are trying to sue Stark industries. They get sued *daily* on busier months. But the fact that Daredevil has apparently now met Philza and Technoblade and *not* immediately tried to kill them — like he had tried to beat the shit out of the Avengers when they first met — and even managed to *make friends with them*? That's the kicker for Tony.

“Oh— and Mr. Parker happens to be with them as well,” says his traitor of an AI son, a smug lilt to his voice. Tony *groans*.

The law offices are fucking *packed* when Foggy finally arrives. Vultures swarm all about, circling in on one singular office, all of them whispering and gossiping as if they’re schoolchildren, not an elite circle of lawyers hired to back one of the most famous technology development companies in the world.

“Scuse me,” he says, squeezing past them. “As you were.” He continues apologizing for his own presence until it becomes clear that no one could care less. It takes him a good ten minutes to part the veritable sea of sharks, shuffling past with only his briefcase and burner in hand.

But finally, in the middle of the massive throng of bodies, stands Matt, tie undone and hair messy, hands planted on some random shmucks desk as he gets into what can only be described as a very quiet and very scary screaming match. Foggy hears things such as “my clients” and “they exist” and “no, that’s not a humane way to treat someone” being thrown around, so he’s immediately a little worried.

“Hey, buddy,” he murmurs, shuffling over and patting one hand into Matt’s shoulder, squeezing it comfortingly, rubbing at the tense muscles there. His friend looks up. He doesn’t doubt that Matt felt him coming from the bottom of the tower, but the amount of people around him must be overwhelming. “You doing ok?” he whispers under his breath, a secret message — because he knows Matt is focused in on his voice right now.

“All good,” he replies back calmly. Foggy can hear the relief in it. “Just attempting to explain how housing two off-world foreigners inside Avengers tower where they’re completely isolated from any outside stimuli is an objectively *bad idea*.”

He doesn’t even bother asking for a single ounce of context. If he needed context, he wouldn’t be a good lawyer. “Right. And where are our clients?”

“I let our intern take them out for ice cream,” he replies casually like Nelson and Murdock can afford to have an intern.

“And— which of our many prestigious and well-fed interns might that be, buddy?” Foggy dares to ask, dreading the probably very confusing answer.

“Peter Parker.”

“Ah,” Foggy muses dryly, because it’s an answer that both makes a lot of sense and absolutely none. Since when does Spiderman work for them?

“They were *here*?”

“Yes sir.”

“And you let two well-known off worlders *leave*, J?”

“I didn’t notice them until too late, sir,” says Tony’s child, like he isn’t the all-seeing eye of Avenger’s tower. He groans, spinning around in his swivel chair, rubbing his palms deep into his eyes. “Oh— and I’ve given Mr. Parker temporary permission to handle your credit card per your request.”

“You *what*?”

—

This isn’t the weirdest thing Deshawn has ever seen at his job at the grocery store. Not really. Not in a world where the Avengers might pop in and steal an entire freezer’s worth of frozen pizzas at 3 am on a Sunday after fighting a magical ooze monster risen from the dead. And *damn*, they smelled, too.

So no. When a man with actual wings and a man with giant tusks jutting out of his face and also maybe a ten-year-old walks into the store, he’s not incredibly concerned. He just continues on with his job, scanning the groceries of the old woman before him, trying desperately not to crush her eggs when she asks that he put them in the bag first for some reason.

He’s perhaps a little bit *intrigued*, though, when said gaggle of bird-hog-child men walk up to his counter with an entire shopping cart filled with ice cream. That’s a bit of an understatement. It’s filled with and also *towering with* the sweet treat, haphazardly tossed together until there’s a veritable mountain of rocky road and mint chocolate chip and strawberry and even the Avenger’s themed ones.

“Uh,” he says, eloquently.

“Can we just give you a thousand dollars and you can keep the change?” asks the small boy between the two other man. Oh my god — that guy is like, *7 feet tall*. “I really don’t wanna make you scan for this all.

The two elder man are standing behind the kid like Deshawn is about to reach over and eat that mop of ridiculous blond hair. It’s a little insulting, frankly, but when he nods, slowly and confusedly, they brighten up like he’s just told them they won the lottery. From there he starts the very confusing process of scanning the kid’s credit card — which reroutes it all to *Tony Stark*, who, when called, reroutes him to a very polite and amused british man who tells him to clear the purchase.

Deshawn doesn’t know anything about british people besides what he learned about them in middle school. He knows Tony Stark isn’t English, either. But he isn’t an idiot, and so he hangs up on the man with a smile and ushers the bird-man, tusked-man, and child through the line.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Here's a short and fluffy chapter! As my server already knows, I'm fucking freaking out over the fact that y'all have gotten this silly little story to over 1000 kudos. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you all, ahhh!!! sobs!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sounds of spoons scraping against cardboard fills the room. No one is speaking — so solely focused on the cartons of ice cream in their hands that there's really no need to describe their excitement.

Technoblade and Phil, as Peter soon realizes, have never had ice cream. *Ever*. So, naturally, he told them they should try a spoonful of each flavor they'd bought. But then they'd gotten so attached to each flavor that they'd cleared all the cartons, obsessing over the sugary, frozen treat.

Phil seems to really like the more exotic flavors — like the fancy ones you get at the grocery stores where ice cream costs 6 dollars for a pint — while Techno seems to be a huge fan of anything that mixes chocolate and fruit. As for Peter, he tends to stay away from anything mint and enjoy literally anything else.

And — sue him — Peter *really* likes ice cream. He's curled up at the foot of the couch in front of Phil and Techno, the two of them so hunched over on their individual cartons that it can't be comfortable. Everything about it is so peaceful and warm and somehow, *happy*, despite the fact that it had been so complicated and fearful only hours before. It's all so fun that he's half-convinced he's going to start vibrating out of his own skin — so sue him again — he pulls out a fidget spinner.

He knows they're not cool anymore. But he never *had them* to be cool, he had them because he's got a lot of undiagnosed ADHD rattling around in his head and no money for all the sexy, sweet Adderall he should probably have. So, setting his spoon down on the coffee table, he tugs the little red spinner out of his pocket, flicking a finger against one side and staring out the window. The sun has started to set, and finally, the clouds are breached, soft golden rays splashing against the city where the rain has paused its downpour.

Then, from behind him, he hears Technoblade let out a soft chuckle. He turns to look at the man — and woah, Peter will never get over how tall he is — to see him looking at Phil, suddenly bent over and staring at the fidget spinner in Peter's hands with a very lost, very concentrated expression.

“You alright there, Phil?” Techno rumbles, putting a hand between the avian’s wings and smiling fondly at him.

“S— yeah, s’ all good, mate,” he murmurs right back, though he keeps leaning forward, expression concentrated on the flimsy plastic thing in Peter’s hand, the ball bearings spinning as he flicks it again, a grin growing on his face as he realizes that his newfound friend is obsessed with the tiny, ridiculous, mass-produced, *toy*.

Slowly, watching as Phil’s eyes follow every movement, Peter sets the fidget spinner on the table in front of them. He holds down the middle and spins the outside and then lets it sit there, quietly whirring, Phil’s bright blue eyes wide and almost *excited*, like a crow finding a new shiny thing to snatch up.

He looks up at Peter and shakes the expression away, instead adopting one a bit more sheepish. “Can— Can I try it?”

“Go right ahead,” he urges with a grin, because he knows *exactly* how this is going to go.

Phil leans over, discarding his ice cream and pressing the fidget spinner onto the glass table, blackened fingers dancing over it hesitantly. Then, he flicks it, and a sharp gasp falls from his lips the moment it starts spinning, eyes going so owlishly wide that they’re almost cartoonish.

“*Bwoosh*,” he murmurs, leaning back and keeping one hand hovering around it as he stares, as if he’s worried about disturbing its endlessly spinning path. His eyes trace it, flicking around, a toothy grin slowly spreading across his face.

Then, from behind him, Technoblade chuckles. It grows, and it grows, — until suddenly — he’s full out laughing, bowed over and snorting into his knees as he watches Phil stare distractedly at the little thing spinning on the table.

“Yer’ jus’ -” He cuts off with another round of laughter, hissing out from behind his teeth when he tries to subdue it. “You’re just a big oversized crow. *Bruh*.”

“*Fucker*,” Phil responds, but he’s still so distracted that when he tries to turn out and smack Technoblade lightly on the leg for his trouble, he instead accidentally hits him in the nose. This just makes the larger man reel back and snicker harder, clutching his face and letting laughter spill out from behind his hands.

Peter smiles at the scene before him. Not too many hours earlier, Phil had been a soaking wet pile of feathers having some sort of flashback in an alleyway, probably halfway ready to jump Peter and *run*. But now, he’s got his back to the ground and his eyes focused on a children’s fidget toy, spinning it every few seconds when it starts to slow. Not only is it endearing — it sorta makes Peter feel *good*. Like he’s still helping these two otherworldly men, no matter how small or odd the impact may be. A fidget spinner is something so cheap and easily found, and yet Phil treats it like he’s been starved of any joy in his entire damned *life*.

“You can keep it,” he blurts suddenly. He doesn’t regret it, though, no matter how impulsive the decision.

Phil's head snaps around so quickly it cracks. "Wha'?"

"You can keep it," Peter repeats, motioning meaningfully at the slowly spinning toy. Phil looks between him and it, a lost expression scrawled across his face.

"I— Mate, I can't," he replies, leaning over and picking it back up, handing it out to Peter with a mournful, but accepting, expression. "It's yours."

"Dude, they cost like 1 dollar at a convenience store, I'm serious." He leans forward and curls Phil's hands around the toy, his fingers thin and long and shaking, just enough to be noticeable. *Man* — are these people really so skittish that they're terrified of the idea of owning someone's *fidget spinner*? When Phil's hand remains loose around it, Peter grins, shoving it away. "*Seriously.*"

For a moment the winged man just stares at him, head half-cocked and eyes narrowed — not in anger, but in pure confusion. Then, his gaze drifts to his hand, and his fingers twitch into an actual hold on the toy.

Suddenly, the elevator doors slide open and Phil yanks his arm back, quick as a whip, slipping the fidget spinner into his pocket before anyone sees it, posing himself on the ground as if he thinks he'll need to leap up and start sprinting off the moment anyone sees him. Technoblade sort of does the same — rising to stand, all expression of mirth gone.

Out of the elevator doors, stepping onto Philza and Technoblade's floor, are Tony and Steve.

—

Steve doesn't think he's a perfect man.

Despite the assumptions some people like to make that he's full of himself, he knows that he's deeply flawed. That's why he was chosen to be who he is — he wasn't a perfect soldier, nor a perfect man, but he was *aware of that*.

The proof of his flaws faces him right now. Craft's face is white despite his determined expression, and it's clear that the subtle posturing of his wings is a defensive one, not at all casual.

He steps out from the elevator with Tony at his side, guilt wringing at his chest. He can admit when he's wrong — and though he had not *known* his words would set Philza off, that isn't the point. The fault is still his own, the idea that he'd brought up a real occurrence and not an absurd, outlandish story, eating at his chest.

"I'm sorry," he sighs, after a few miserably long seconds of tense silence. "I had absolutely no right to go up and make a joke like that, and I hope you know that not only do none of us want to keep you from flying, it is, technically, illegal."

"As your little friend has reminded us," Tony continues, giving Peter a raised eyebrow, the boy returning it with a sheepish grin. "People with extra abilities need accommodating for

said abilities. If I had known that not flying genuinely bothered you like that, I would've figured something out for you, Craft."

Neither of them responds. Steve gets the idea that they aren't fond of accepting apologies.

So, instead of moaning and crying about offworlders and their proclivity for not understanding on-world earth customs, he steps forward, gesturing between the two of them. "That's why we came up here. We'd like to ask how we can improve your time here while you wait for legal citizenship. The tower is huge. There are more than enough places to go and—" he points at Phil's wings, trying to ignore how the man flinches and how Technoblade adopts a stormy expression. "Fly, or just stretch your wings out. We know you need to do *that*, but is there anything else? Anything for you?" He finishes, looking over at Technoblade.

The other man seems surprised to be addressed at all, as if his health and safety weren't even a consideration in his mind. His eyes dart down to Philza — and then to *Peter*, oddly enough, as if searching for reassurance, and it has Steve wondering how the young vigilante so easily got through to these strange, violent men.

"You don't need to have a full list or anything, we just—"

Steve is interrupted by the taller of the two men stepping forward, something worryingly hungry in his expression. His hand moves to his hip as if searching for a scabbard, crimson eyes dark and narrowed.

"I want to *spar*."

—

Once Steve and Tony are sufficiently sure that sparring doesn't just mean "murder everyone" in Technoblade's homeland, they allow it. They aren't the leaders of the Avengers — but Tony owns the tower, and Steve works as about as close to a captain as they *have*, so they make the decision and they stick with it. All the better to avoid the veritable *pr nightmare* that is *Matt Murdock*.

The Avengers' tower's training floor is a masterpiece. It's nearly as tall as two normal floors, with many perches and ledges for people to swing onto and jump from. There are fighting rings, places to exercise normally, terrain simulators, and even a form of holographic pre-programmed AI enemy, all designed and provided by Tony and Stark industries at large.

So what he's saying is that *oh*, they really should have just let the two offworlders use the place sooner.

They get suited up quickly. Neither has the proper equipment yet, but Philza pulls on an oddly shaped black halter top, aerodynamic and sleek across his chest, likely made specifically to aid with flight. Technoblade just throws on a button-down — he doesn't seem to care much for protection. Neither of them puts on armor, despite the magnificently carved *vibranium* armor they'd come to this universe in.

Most of the other Avengers have joined the group in the time it has taken for the two to get dressed. Clint has been curious about their fighting for days — and Natasha has been more than suspicious. Bruce declines his own invitation to join, but Wanda and Vision have come down to observe from afar. It's clear that everyone is curious about the winged and giant men that have come to live with them.

“Alright. A few house rules,” Says Tony, pointing to one of the many allotted spaces for casual sparring. Philza and Technoblade seem confused by the idea of rules at all. “No injuring each other. If y’ do, fight’s getting shut down. No leaving the square. Doing so is an immediate end to the fight since other people are in here and you two are known to bring around a lot of property damage costs.”

“Why no injuries?” Asks Technoblade, completely ignoring the quip about the thousands of dollars of damages they’ve incurred toward Tony. “S’ Not like they’re permanent.”

Tony gives him a funny look. “Uh, *yeah*, they could be pretty damn easily. Running through someone with a sword isn’t polite on this planet, k?”

This clearly isn’t the answer that Technoblade wants, his eyebrow raised and hands poised on his hips. Him and Philza share a confused, slightly aghast look, but the winged one just shrugs, arms raised above his head as he stretches, neck letting out an awful crack.

It starts slow.

Philza pulls a blade from nothingness, black and gold metal shimmering as if glazed by the sun’s light itself — despite the absence of any windows close enough to hit the sword. Technoblade smiles, simple and poised, and a matching sword is brought out from behind his back, the soft *shing* of metal against metal coming from seemingly nowhere.

There’s a bow, some sort of odd ritual which requires high, mantled wings, and a tail swept around Technoblade’s heels. They nearly miss the ground, bodies bent and contorted and prostrate in the air, before their legs sweep backward, and their heads raise, and with a *grin*—

Metal crashes against metal. Vibranium slams against vibranium and the shockwave it creates reverberate around the room, even though both Technoblade and Philza seem utterly unaffected by the jolt going through their arms. The avian ducks down low as Technoblade’s sword swings high, narrowly avoiding a slash across his neck. From there he rolls down to his knees and raises his wings, using them to trip his opponent, lurching back up from the ground the instant he has an opening.

Technoblade throws his entire weight forward as he leaps back up, heavy, arching swings cutting jagged holes through the air, so wide and mountainous that Steve wonders if he could somehow manage to cut through the *world*, giving himself a path right back home. Philza, on the other hand, is much lighter on his feet. He prances backward and forward on birdlike steps, conserving his strength for long and sweeping blows that expel all of his saved-up energy. They match each other well — the butt end of a sword slamming into someone’s ribs, a blade swinging just nearly past someone’s fragile, sweat-soaked skin.

They look like they're dancing. Their steps are perfected, every bit of their battle a performance — yet no punches are pulled. It's as if they know each other so well that the thought of landing a single hit is so far away that their blades just *can't*, so perfectly dipping away from delicate flesh at the last moment, pulled back but in a way that promises that if they wanted to — they could kill one another in *seconds*.

It goes on and on like that. Steve wouldn't doubt it if someone told him they'd been fighting for *hours*, but it can only have been a little more than five minutes at the most. With each movement it seems a bit more catharsis is released, the ordinarily skittish and nervous offworlders becoming arguably *lethal*. Suddenly, the Avengers are no longer faced with paranoid and traumatized young adults, but destructive forces so great that it makes them wonder *how Technoblade and Philza lost against them at all*.

If Steve was a less private man, he'd be forced to admit that they're *scary*.

But all good — all *terrifying* — things must come to an end. Neither of them seems to have started getting tired at all, but the stunts that they're pulling have become riskier and riskier, their blades falling a little heavier with every blow. Spinning, twirling, twisting, jagged moves that Steve wouldn't have recognized from a fencing class in his time — or more accurately any time this *century*. They fight like old, long-forgotten things, beautiful and deadly.

A whirling of blades. A clash, and a tumble — one leg slipping, one hoof dragging across the mat, a back hitting the edge, a sword to fall —

Philza stands above Technoblade, one boot firmly pressing into his friend's chest, his sword halfway plunged into the deep red color of the mat below them. Fangs bared, the defeated man is grinning, held up only by his elbows as he narrowly avoids the sword beside him.

“My fuckin’ *mats!*” Tony whines, breaking the stunned silence. He runs forward to inspect the damage as Phil pulls his sword from the slit, reaching one hand out and pulling Technoblade off the ground. They're both smiling, sweating, chests heaving, the electricity amongst them broken as their fight is ended.

Philza lets out a sharp whistle. “Fuckin’ hell, I’ve missed doing that, mate.” He looks up at Tony, who seems to still be moaning over the damage his property has sustained — despite the fact that Steve breaks about 10 punching bags a day and Thor has never used a toaster and ended up with anything other than a mangled hunk of wires and scrap. “You’re lettin’ us do this again, right?”

“Of course,” Steve responds smoothly before Stark can shout at them about never being allowed in the tower ever again. For as much of a genius as the man is meant to be, he doesn't think of what his words mean. *Lawyers*. “We shouldn't have prohibited you from traveling the tower anyway,” he finishes, and he means it.

Truly, he understands how it feels to be cooped up and trapped in an unfamiliar place. Perhaps even better than anyone here save for the men before him — because he's the man out of time, isn't he? He still remembers his day trapped within SHIELD's headquarters, unable to go outside because it was a *liability*. He's not exactly proud that he didn't think

about those same circumstances applied to two people who have never been on this *planet*, let alone this time.

Chapter End Notes

Philza with a fidget spinner send tweet whores

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

OOoOOOooOOOooooOOO The halloween episode! nothing can go wrong here, right?

.....

Right?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Apparently, they exist now.

Sure — they always existed. They're as old as dust in comparison to quite a few other people, and incredibly noticeable as well, with inhuman features that can't just be explained away as costumes. But now, in an age where information can allegedly be spread across the entire world in an *instant*, a lot of people have an idea of Technoblade and Phil existing.

Most people think Technoblade and Phil are what is called a cryptid. Some others think they're another thing called mutants. An odd minority, full of paranoia and naivety, wonders if they're *Gods*.

Of course, they're only hybrids. As normal as they come — though Phil's wings are certainly a bit rare, even in their own universe. But this new world seems to designate them as oddities and fantastical and *wonderful* — grouping them immediately with the superheroes they've begun to stay with.

So, apparently, the media has gotten word that they exist and are staying at Avenger's tower. Tony Stark warns them that the next time they leave, they'll probably get attacked by news reporters. When they start taking their swords out at that, he corrects himself and says swarmed, rather than *attacked*. Phil and Techno, who rather fancy a fight, are only slightly miffed.

As it is, the month is October. The wind is cold and the rain outside is dreary, but it gives the buildings around them a beautiful silver sheen, so far divorced from the snow of the Arctic that the two often find themselves sitting in front of windows and simply *watching*.

Apparently, in October this world has some sort of tradition of costuming yourself and asking for candy. In *their* world, where Samhain is the tradition of choice for most regardless of spirituality, the occasion is far bloodier. It usually means blood sacrifice and the tradition of trying to raise demons, but Techno and Phil never believed in that much. Samhain is about the ushering in of the darker half of the year. Where the world can only be lit by lanterns and

the darkness is *eternal*, forcing the inhabitants of the world to confront that same bitter blackness within themselves.

But no. Here, on this earth, there is Halloween. Samhain once existed, and a religious melting pot called the Pagans apparently still practice it, but the greater population of the world calls this *evil* or *sin* or *blasphemy*. Philza and Technoblade both know better than to believe in any God save for that of Death herself, but it's still incredibly annoying to see traditions they once practiced be treated like *dirt*.

Anyways. The holiday called Halloween is one of disguise and fright. One look at Vision's "Amazon" proves to Phil and Techno that it's really just a cash grab, but the man seems inordinately excited so they don't do him the injustice of commenting.

No. They don't comment. So, when Tony Stark comes to them and asks if they want to try and venture out to a small Stark Industries donor party, it's sort of a relief. (Being hated by the assholes they're living with doesn't seem like the best idea right now.)

In the days leading up to the party, several people in the Avenger's tower start trying on ridiculous costumes. They're surprisingly well made, and most of them bulletproof in some way as well, but they are, at their heart, *ridiculous*.

Phil has taken to visiting Natasha Romanoff in his off-time. She's dangerous, but she doesn't shy away from that. Hands cuffed to the bed, nails painted bloody, eyes furious. Natasha is a coiled serpent in the way *they* are. There's the potential to strike in every one of her movements, and Phil finds comfort in that.

Her costume is less of a costume and more of just an outfit. She employs Phil's help to zip the back as they chat idly about nothing. It's a short, loose dress, white with red and gold details on the train. The chest has been shaped to give it the appearance of rotted fabric, sloughing down her breasts in a way that is anything but natural.

"You look pleased," she says with a sarcastic sort of chuckle, as she watches Phil in the mirror before her.

His lips quirk up in a half-smile as he focuses on zipping the dress up. It snags a few times, and he fumbles — zippers aren't exactly common in his Earth's closet — but he gets it anyway, and quickly moves away to let her observe it all in full. "I just don't know why you'd want to look like a corpse."

"As if you don't already sort of look like one," she replies teasingly, brushing her hands against the odd white lace on her shoulders. Then, turning back to Phil, she grins. "You sleep about as much as the rest of us."

"Aye, fuck you, mate." Natasha laughs at his faux irritation as his wings shuffle against his back. He *likes* Natasha. She reminds him of some of the soldiers back home. Hardened and quiet and *vicious*, but equally as willing to go out and drink with you if they have the time. There's something dark and awful in her past, but she doesn't share it. It's the same with Phil. God knows he has enough to be pathetic about. The two of them get along.

“No, I get it,” she says solemnly. “Rest never does come for the wicked, does it?”

“Is that a reference? You know I’m shit with those. I’m not from around here.”

A peal of laughter like ice. “No, Craft. I just mean that we all have enough issues to supplement an alcoholic for decades.” She pats him once, lightly, on the shoulder. He moves away. Not in any sort of dislike for her, but in dislike of what the touch of anyone here means.

Technoblade seems to have begun to get on with Bruce Banner in the meantime. When Phil and he are apart — which is still very rare, even now — he goes down to the man’s lab. They find solace in the fact that they both have literal demons hanging over them. While Bruce’s is certainly more noticeable than Techno’s, it’s a small comfort.

“So. Yer not goin’ to the thing, right?”

A shake of the head. Bruce bites his lip and busies himself with a slip of paper, pushing up his glasses impatiently. Technoblade waits for an answer, observing the man’s frantic scribbling with not much care for what it means.

“No. No, definitely not,” he replies, chuckling, “I am not a party guy. And neither is the *big guy*.” At this, Bruce taps the side of his head with his pen. “Wouldn’t want another thousand dollar property damage bill on my paycheck this month.”

Technoblade, who has no concept of money at all and in fact bought enough ice cream to pay for a full semester of college just a few weeks ago, nods sagely. “Mhm.”

“Do you think you’ll go?” Bruce asks curiously, spinning around in his chair and tilting his head.

He doesn’t really want to all that much. Technoblade never was a fan of the galas and dances and parties his empire required — but he didn’t go for himself. He went for Phil, mostly. Phil can’t talk his way out of a cardboard box, and Technoblade would rather just smash the box. But together, they’re decent enough at being palatable that people listen to them. And, Phil’s proclivity for long, drawn-out speeches when he gets drunk is a little useful. And funny. *Very* funny.

“Ah I mean I’m gonna *try*, but I dunno what I’m supposed to dress up as.” He wrinkles his nose, tail thrashing softly against the ground at the idea of some cheap disguise. “M’ not really...”

Bruce laughs at his vague gesture to the world at whole. “Nah, I didn’t think you’d be into it either. You could always just pretend the whole otherworldly not-human look is just a costume. Craft’s wings will probably fit him well.”

“That’s probably cause they’re attached to him,” Techno mutters dryly. “That’s probably a good idea though. I’m startin’ to think Vision is going to try and get me into a dress. He keeps lookin’ at me funny.”

“He’s also probably trying to get you into therapy, bud!” Bruce replies with a cheery disposition, setting his pen to paper and continuing to write. As if on queue, his glasses start to slide down the bridge of his nose once again. He groans.

So they resign themselves to this party — a mockery of Samhain’s traditions, really — and to the disguises that aren’t really disguises that they must wear. Turns out, most of the other Avengers aren’t going in real costumes either. Natasha has her zombie-esque dress. Thor is wearing traditional Asgardian garb. Steve has dressed up as Tony, actually, and vice versa. Wanda is a... Demon? *The Devil*? And Vision is an Angel.

Technoblade gets a laugh out of that. Phil bristles and reminds his friend that his days of masquerading as The Angel of Death are long past. Technoblade reminds *him* that it’s still a funny name. Phil starts to bring up a certain God and that snaps the piglin hybrid right back out of it.

It’s in a large, flat building, made of marble and arches and swirls. They’re escorted out of a limousine to a crowd of people with flashing lights and screaming voices. It’s a whirlwind. It’s *painful*. Phil watches as Techno’s tail slips across his back and he curls closer, huddled under his wings. He’s overwhelmed himself, but he knows that Techno’s advanced senses have not yet acclimated to the noise of this world.

Vision and Wanda flank them from the back. Natasha is at their side, Steve at the other, Tony in the front. They move at a snail’s pace as the Avengers answer questions and tell stories and make more and more noise.

Eventually, *thankfully*, Natasha notices just how much it seems to be bothering the newcomers of this world. Phil feels her hand on his shoulder — blinks back the fog of dissociation, moves closer into Technoblade. When had they gotten so attached? When had Techno ducked down beneath Phil’s wing, and when had Phil started gripping at his friend’s arm like a lifeline? When had he started to shake? When—

“Breathe,” says Natasha from the side, her voice even and monotone. There’s no panic in her tone. It’s comforting. It’s familiar. The ambiance is so very similar to Technoblade’s, and it seems to put him at ease just as much as it does Phil. “Can you handle this?”

There’s no judgment in her tone, but the two of them still hesitate. The sky is dark and encompassing, stars drowned out by the neon glow of the city and the buildings that spiral far above. The ground beneath their feet rotates just as quickly as it always has. There’s a sense of true comfort in knowing that, but at the same time, their surroundings are so incredibly different that for a moment, they falter.

“I think so,” Phil says firmly, looking up at Technoblade as the hybrid extracts himself from his wings. He’s given a nod — which Natasha returns in stride. “Can we just—” a deep breath “-go inside?”

“Of course,” she replies immediately, and he feels a slight tug on his wrist as he’s led away from the crowd. The chorus of screams and the bright flashes of the camera lights follow them, but with her impenetrable form, it feels lessened in some subtle way. The stairs up to the building are lit with soft blue spotlights, the marble a beautiful shining white. The front

doors are a deep shade of brown, golden handles thrown open the instant Natasha approaches them.

Inside, there is a *ballroom*.

That's the best way to describe it. It's something out of their own world, with marble banisters scaling their way up to the ceiling, pillars just as high and flush against it. Red and golden carpets lie beneath plush armchairs and couches, spots to lounge and eat and negotiate. Costumed, unknown faces mill about, everything from completely unfamiliar sorts of things to skeletons and zombies and what is known to them.

Long tables of food laden with delicacies unheard of. Servers wandering about, trays in their hands, smiling and laughing with guests rather than bowing stiffly and leaving immediately after being addressed. Noise rattles the building, but it's *excited*, the energy *alive*, nothing like the formals of their own empire where negotiations were the most important part and everything else was secondary to utterly unknown.

"Holy fuck," Phil says before his tongue can stop him. Luckily, as he splutters, Natasha just laughs.

"Do you two want me to stay with you? Or can I go off and chat with the masses while you eat?" She asks, gesturing to the sprawling crowd of people. They're loosely strung together, some swaying in time to the classical music from above, others simply standing still and watching. It can't be *that* overwhelming, right?

They set off into the depths of the hall, hands still clutching each others' and eyes bright with wonder. They are glanced at as they pass, some people gasping in awe at their presumed costumes — and though the looks are pervasive and fascinated, no one comes to harass them. There are no suitors waiting for their hands or armies begging for their blades. They just... *are*.

Technoblade is handed a plate once they step up to the buffet, Phil watching behind him, receiving his own a moment later. At first, they're hesitant, slowly piling food on their plates — but when other people pass by with far heavier dishes, their worries are swept away, replaced by decadent fruits and spreads and wines.

The Avengers trickle inside one by one. There's Tony and Steve and Pepper together, speaking to a small group of interested investors. Natasha is chatting up an old, rich-looking woman. Thor is pillaging the buffet behind them, drinking far too much wine for anyone to drink.

Instead of joining the others, Phil and Technoblade move to the booths secluded in the back, where the moonlight hardly hits them and the lights are dimmed. Techno's cloak hits the ground even when he sits, and Phil's wings dangle there, dragging gently against the polished floors.

"This is..."

“Not terrible,” Technoblade finishes for Phil, grunting out a laugh as he takes a sip of wine. Phil mimics the movement, eyes widening at the depth and warmth of the drink, far different from the coarse taste of old mead at home. “I can get down with food and drink like this.”

“So long as the pa— papa— pa *praza*,” Phil stutters out, choking on the odd word, “-Stops harassing us. I feel like I can still see their stupid fucking camera flashes in my eyes.”

Techno raises his glass and clinks it lightly against Phil’s. “That’ll be the wine, I think.”

They sit there and speak quietly of nothing at all. The golden light sets Phil’s hair aflame and assures that Techno’s eyes never stop bleeding, the two of them so clearly otherworldly that people passing by find their eyes caught and their bodies *trapped*, transfixed on starlight-black wings and the monstrous height of the man across from said plumage.

Their outfits don’t do anything to diminish this appearance. They’re both dressed in relatively simple suits. But they wear floor-length cloaks, a soft blue with a blood red carnation at the heart of each. Golden netherite armor adorns their shoulders and calves, pressed and molded tightly to their skin till it looks like scales. They are, quite literally, *glowing*.

Everything feels alright. Every once in a while the Avengers circle over and ask how they’re doing. They drink. They eat. They even chat occasionally with passerbyes who are more than a little mystified by their inhuman characteristics, respectfully asking who supplied them with such realistic tail and wing. They only receive wry smiles and eyes heavy with hidden jokes in response.

Everything is alright. Until—

Technoblade is sure the man means no harm. It’s easy to get worked up into anger at the smallest of things. He *knows this*. He also knows that he — or even worse, *Phil*, — may be punished for starting anything at this event. That is why, when the man comes up and grabs his tail so hard a clump of fur comes away with it, he only freezes with a click of his jaw that sounds like a gunshot.

“Oh, this is quite beautiful isn’t it?” slurs the man, his eyes empty and sharp, his hands gnarled with age as they *pet* Technoblade’s tail, as they hungrily tug at the limb upon his back. It feels as if someone has taken his back and set it on fire, his entire spine alight with the pain that is the foreign, invasive touch.

He tries to yank his tail away. The touch is too heavy. He tries to— to *stand*, to *speak*, but he’s frozen, and if it were any other place, he would’ve struck the man down but this is in public in a foreign land and he has a duty to be *quiet* and unobtrusive and keep Phil and himself *safe*.

“Get— the fuck *off*,” snarls Phil all of a sudden, and Technoblade’s vision focuses to see his friend standing, advancing forward with an awful grimace to his face and violence in his eyes. He snaps one clawed hand out and stops the avian in an instant, slowly, minutely shaking his head. He realizes quite suddenly that he is shaking, and his vision is blurred, and he can hardly breathe— but the fight isn’t worth it. They *can’t*.

Someone appears behind them. Technoblade hears a hushed voice that he can barely recognize and the awful touch lessens, slipping off with one last soft chuckle. He can't see. He can't breathe — but he can feel the familiar cold of familiar fingers landing on his face, cupping his jaw, the voice attached murmuring sweet whispers.

But—

But he can't *breathe*.

Technoblade is a warrior. He *fight*s. He screams and roars and weeps a tide of black blood, bone-jagged shards of his sword sweeping through his enemies and destroying them. But he can't *breathe*, and he sags in Phil's touch, a wounded thing so embarrassing and awful it *burns* slipping between his teeth, born to tear and break and rip.

He's being led somewhere. The hands on his face have migrated to his hands, both of them being led as he stumbles, swaying slightly. His feet move on autopilot, obeying the one safe and familiar and kind thing in this entire world. *Phil*. Phil, who he is meant to protect, who he is *failing*, and Technoblade cannot *breathe*—

A door swings shut. The light is brighter, now, muted grey shadows flowing across tile where the ceiling lamps above cannot reach it. He feels his legs wobble, and then—

Then he's sinking, back against a wall, and someone is murmuring to him. His legs fall out before him, and his hands are against the ground, the familiar cool of Phil's fading away. Then, there's a pressure on his shoulders, as hands gently push him into the wall, forcing him to sink back. He leans forward with a humiliating noise of comfort. Then something is sliding across his legs, and arms are reaching behind his back, pulling him back off the wall until he's swept up in some familiar grip.

"You're ok," whispers Phil as his wings open, mantling around them and shrouding them in darkness. Techno lets out a soft groan at the wonderful, burning pressure grounding him, Phil's legs in his lap and arms squeezed tightly across his chest. When his head lands on the avian's chest, the man just sinks his chin down into Technoblade's hair and hushes the wounded sound still rising in his chest. "I've got you. You're ok. Just breathe, Tech. Follow mine."

Phil's chest rises against Techno's cheek and he moves to copy it, stuttering slightly as the presence of tears against his jaw makes itself known, darkening the perfect fabric of Phil's suit. Why is this *affecting him so much*? Why is he *panicking* over something so *small*? It doesn't make any sense. He is a warrior, feared and dangerous and violent and *awful*, and—

And he cries, softly, sitting there and being rocked back and forth as Phil warbles soft, comforting chirps into his neck. The pressure on his skin is tightening and perhaps to anyone else it would be painful but to Technoblade it is *bliss*. Undeserved, beautiful, *bliss*.

"He didn't know it was real," Phil whispers, pressing a soft kiss to the crown of Technoblade's head, the warm touch of his hands feeling as if it is digging right through his skull and into his chest. "Stark had him escorted out."

It takes a moment for that to process. He lies there in Phil's arms, all bundled up by his cloak and wings, and he shudders. "Stark?" he murmurs confusedly, his voice raw and thick with exhaustion.

"Yeah. Came up right behind the guy and told him to fuck off." A shift as Phil's head turns to the side. "In nicer words, sure, but mate—he was *furious*. Told the guy off for a couple a' minutes, went off about consent and shit. Security took him out. It was sort of epic to watch."

A long silence. Then, as Techno's vision sharpens again, settling on the bright red carnation nestled against Phil's collarbones, he lets out a chuckle, nestling his head on his friend's sternum. "Stark is..."

"Stark is," Phil repeats, agreeing with a hum. "Stark's got his moments, I guess, mate."

They lapse back into silence. Phil leans ever closer, pressing his entire chest into Technoblade's, keeping him grounded with the pressure as he rocks the piglin hybrid into a calmness rarely achieved. His breath puffs gently into his hair, one hand moving from his back to rub at the soft fur behind his ears, massaging gentle circles until a soft purr runs steadily through Technoblade.

There's a soft ding as Phil's phone receives a notification. He glances at it, arms never shifting from their position holding Technoblade to his chest, deep pressure spread across him. There's no obligation for him to attend to the noise nor anything else, nearly half-asleep in the smaller man's arms.

"Natasha says we're leaving, mate. Do you think you can get up?" His heart beats harder at this suggestion, but Phil's hand lands against his chest and *pushes* against the pulse, a helpful weight. "I'll be there with you. Peter is back at the tower."

Both of those things don't sound too bad. So Techno nods mutely, mourning the loss of Phil's legs against his own as the avian stands, hands still held to the other man's chest. The smaller man is effortlessly gentle as he coaxes Techno up to stand, one arm around his back, his wings wrapped around the both of them. He's so overwhelmed and so exhausted at once, but Phil keeps him walking, the pressure of his arms against his back a nice contrast from the weightlessness of dissociation.

Getting to their car is a bit more of an ordeal. The quiet of the ballroom has dissolved entirely into badly concealed whispers, only silenced when Natasha — their functioning escort — sends them a look that Techno cannot see but knows is as cold as ice.

The outside is worse. Flashing lights. Overwhelming shouts. There are no words. At least—it sounds like words, but the cordless dissonance of the screaming of the others is nigh incomprehensible, as Techno is forced to straighten, to present himself as ok, even with Phil's arm and wings at his back. He stumbles several times, world listing to the side, ears flat against his skull and vision *turning*, feet slamming into each other. Phil is always there to steady him.

The car only has the driver, Steve, and Natasha. Phil slips in first, Techno landing in the middle seat, his body slumping immediately. Natasha sits next to Steve, nodding, saying

something quietly to the Captain, which the Captain says in turn to the driver. The driver nods again, the chain continuing, and the door slams shut.

“Stark is getting the man banned from all other functions,” Steve says suddenly. His voice is swimming as he brings a hand up and takes off Tony’s glasses, folding them into his overshirt. “That was unacceptable, even if your tail was just a costume.”

“M... Just glad ‘e didn’t go for Phil’s wings.”

“Ay. None of that,” replies the avian, digging his elbow gently into Techno’s side before he leans over, sitting up so that Techno can fall over entirely, collapsing into his lap. It’s humiliating. It’s childish. But as Phil’s hand’s card over his hair, his cheek in the avian’s lap, he can’t seem to care. He misses the guilty looks exchanged between Steve and Natasha before his eyes shut.

The drive back is silent entirely, save for the occasional chirp or warble from Phil, noises meant to soothe Techno as his breathing starts to steady and his heart stops pounding out of his chest. His tail curls around the avian’s waist, hidden, warm, cushioned.

When Techno opens his eyes, the city is zooming past, blurred lights and stars far ahead, astigmatism-inducing in nature, burnt into his bright red scleras. The car rides smoothly and quietly, the occasional jolt nothing much. All throughout it, Phil is steady above him, his humiliating panic dwindling as his partner remains by his side.

The tower is dark and quiet. It must be well after 12. He’s finally able to walk on his own, but Phil holds his hand regardless, the two of them flanked protectively by Steve and Natasha, though they don’t see the fierce protectiveness in their makeshift bodyguard’s eyes. Jarvis is silent in the elevator, the lights slightly dim, the whole world seemingly crafted to be less overwhelming and loud.

Peter is there when the doors open again, but Techno is so exhausted that all he can muster is a soft “Heya, kid,” and a half-smile as Phil leads him to the couch. He leans into it with a soft groan, curling around a blanket and pillow that have somewhere along the line begun to be familiar.

“Mr. Stark told me what happened,” Peter says, and his voice is carefully neutral. “You’re sure he’s already been taken care of?”

“Yer’ not allowed to murder random citizens, Peter,” Techno whispers out. He at least knows *that’s* a human law. “Unless you can?”

A sigh as the boy deflates, throwing himself down onto the couch next to Techno. As if with a mind of its own, one of his claws lifts and starts to card through the teenager’s hair, blond and scruffy and clearly having been mussed by his mask. Phil snorts, falling down beside the two. Though he cannot reach Peter with his arms, he covers all of them in his long black wings, shrouding them, protecting them.

“No, I definitely can’t. Which is *dumb*, but Mr. Stark says only Avengers are allowed to kill people and that’s only sometimes and also I don’t really want to murder people. Maybe just

punch them.”

“I’ll do the murdering for you, you little shit,” says Phil, and Techno smiles at the fondness in his friend’s voice. When have they both gotten so attached to the people of this world? When had Techno decided he was ok with Peter curling into his side, playing with the fur of his tail? When had he decided that the Avengers are perhaps not as bad as they once seemed?

The stars are bright, shining through the window, no television nor music ringing out. All they do is watch the night progress, Phil tugging Techno’s hand around a glass of water and making sure he drinks every once in a while. Eventually, Peter must get up and grab more pillows, because Techno feels his friend tug him forward, helping him to lie upon a veritable nest.

Phil sits next to Techno beside the nest. Peter sits above them, kicking his leg as he scrolls through his phone on the couch. Techno sinks into the fabric of the nest, feeling exhaustion tug him under.

The last thing he feels is Phil pressing a soft kiss to his forehead before blissful, dreamless sleep falls across him like wings of night.

Chapter End Notes

Not much went wrong, see, I'm not a total bastard. You guys got protective Avengers!!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This chapter is almost completely pure fluff, I promise. :) Prettyza, Prettynoblade, and Pretty Parker!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Amazon is stupid.

This is the conclusion Phil and Technoblade come to after about an hour looking through the website and finding utter *shit*. Tony tells them he could've told them that — but he says that with a smug sort of look to him, so Phil is pretty sure he was deliberately holding that information back.

The volume of “ads” is ridiculous. All of the clothes have low ratings that refer to things like them falling apart easily or melting in transit. Phil doesn't even want to be shopping for anything, but Natasha and Peter have both been prodding him to get new clothes. Techno seems to be having even more trouble than him — with hooves and incredible height and a tail. At least Phil has opened back options. Even if they *are* incredibly revealing.

So, Amazon is a bad option. Natasha rolls her eyes at Peter when he says that's what they should shop at, anyways, and then sets them up on a far more expensive and high-quality website. When the meager amounts of clothes they buy arrive, though, they're utterly unwearable with the offworlder's odd proportions.

Everything seems utterly hopeless until Sam Wilson and Steve step in.

Steve, who has more than enough talent for finding clothes for people with inhuman proportions, suggests the store. Sam, who knows how to spend money and not knock people out with their immense amounts of spending, tags along.

Phil isn't quite sure where they are in the end. The whole building seems to be some sort of fancy church-shaped castle of clothing. There are still those weird wire baskets on wheels, though, so that's how they end up in their current predicament.

“No, Peter, you cannot sit in the basket.”

The boy in question pouts so hard his eye starts to twitch, looking up at Steve with his hands clasped together. “I am a small, tiny man, sir Captain American. I am a small man and I'm so tired because I stayed up all last night patrolling and I—”

“So you're irresponsible with your time?” Retorts the Captain, breezing past Peter and leaving him to pout instead at Natasha.

She regards the boy for a few seconds with a raised eyebrow. Her head twitches up and down in an instant.

Phil and Technoblade chase after Natasha as she runs quickly away from Steve, Peter sitting in the cart and whooping loudly, bowed over the side and grabbing the occasional funny pair of socks off the racks around them. Steve and Sam chase after them as Sam shouts profanities, and Phil thinks that they must be very lucky the store is almost empty.

“This is what you get for not letting tiny dumb little children sit in shopping carts!” He calls behind his shoulder, hopping back and forth from each foot, head bobbing up and down in a birdlike fashion. A mischievous trill leaks out of his throat as he tugs Techno into a random aisle, running away from the entire procession of people and attempting to hide.

“The store closes at 6!” Sam hollers right back. “We can wait all day for you assholes to come back!”

They both have to stifle laughter, hiding in a rack of clothes and listening to several footsteps pound past. Knees pressed together, Phil’s wings tucked into his back and draped with dresses, they hide there until the noises pass, the shrieks of Peter and the annoyed shouts from Sam and Steve growing quieter and quieter.

After a few minutes of silence and stifled laughter, Techno slips his head out of the rack, scanning either side of the aisle to see if anyone is still there. For a moment he doesn’t react — and then he jumps so hard he hits his head on the metal bar above him, jostling Phil enough that the avian goes tumbling from his position and hits the ground, a *thwump* following his fall as his wings snap out.

“*Augh*— Fuck!” Phil shouts, wings snarled in dresses and clothes and hangers, vision concealed by colorful blurs. He feels hands on his feathers, feels fabric being pulled away, and he aids the helper, ripping it away from his face. Suddenly, blond hair and a wide grin appear above him, Peter pressing a finger to his lip and giggling. “Oh. S’you.”

“It is me! Small stupid tiny dumb child!” He replies, hooking his arms under Phil’s elbows and pulling him off the ground, the avian boneless and glaring. Techno is standing there beside him, arms tucked together, stifling loud chuckles.

“Stop laughin’ at me, dickhead,” he mutters as he stands, brushing himself off before he shoves his fists into Techno’s chest, sending him stumbling backward. One hoof twists in a dress— and then he shouts as he slips again, and they’re all flying toward the ground, and—

And Peter grabs Techno’s collar and Phil’s shoulder and suddenly, they’re hanging there, the young superhero dragging them up by their shirts until they’re upright again. From there — they all start to laugh, trying desperately to tuck the noises into their elbows as the noises of Steve, Sam, and Natasha searching for them continue.

The aisle is a mess. Dresses of all colors and types are scattered around, shimmering sequins glowing in the light or ribbons thrown about and twisting in a colorful sea of fabric. The hardwood floors supposedly beneath them have all but disappeared, and every step displaces another hunk of beautiful, *expensive*, clothes.

“Uh,” says Techno aptly, running a hand through his hair and then pressing it to his forehead, eyes wide. “Uh— *Bruh*. We should probably try this stuff on, huh?”

“I mean,” Phil says, eyeing the shiny things below him, hands flexing. He’s not a bird. He’s not a slave to his impulse. He does not want to try shiny things on. (He’s lying.) “We might as well clean it up, mate.”

He leans down, threading a hand beneath one of the piles. He grabs at least five dresses. Peter stares at him.

Then, with no words spoken, the kid crouches down and starts meticulously picking dresses for the two of them to try on off the ground, handing the ones that won’t fit off to Technoblade to be hung back up. None of them speaks, unwilling to talk about the fact that two prestigious emperors and a superhero are about to be trying on a bunch of ballgowns and slit-necked open-backed dresses. With sequins. And bows. And no sleeves. And—

They head to the dressing rooms with arms full of fabric. An 8-foot beast of muscle, a man with wings, and a teenager with sandy blonde hair. They walk like a funeral procession, and they do not answer when spoken to.

“Ok,” says Peter, finally breaking the silence with a loud laugh as they reach the dressing rooms and are forced to confront the absurdity of their situation. “Oh— oh man, ok. Ok. Phil, you try this one.”

He’s handed a massive lump of soft, mossy-green fabric. It matches the shade on his hat, a soft and earthy color that he runs his hand across on impulse, inspecting the small glittering crystals he finds running down its long, trailing sleeves. When he looks back up, he grins.

“Alright— and then for you, Mr. Technoblade—”

“It’s Techno, kid—”

“This one!” Peter exclaims, ignoring the piglin entirely. Phil snickers as the boy hands over another lacey dress, this time a soft golden color at the top, a stiff corset around the middle. Flowing down from the corset is a sharp, silver-black metal of some sort, though it’s almost like chainmail in the way it shifts and twists. It blends into the petals of golden fabric easily, a huge and poofy skirt beneath it. Techno surveys it with a raised eyebrow, though he does not comment negatively.

“Can I even fit this thing?” He asks, shoving his head beneath the skirt to glance inside. Phil catches a glimpse — there’s about a mile of tulle beneath it.

“It’s like 20 feet long,” Phil says with a laugh, coming over to inspect it as well. He’d thought his own dress was gaudy — but Techno’s just looks *ridiculous*. “I think you could even fit *Floof* into it.”

“Floof wasn’t that big, was he?” He holds the dress back up to the light and squints inside its depths. A metal collar of sort shines up at the neckline, looking as if it would hang loosely off of one’s collarbones. “Nah. He was just fluffy.”

“Floofy,” Phil argues. This goes back and forth for a few minutes while Peter considers the pile of dresses before he yanks out his own and grins.

“Ok! Ok shut up about fluffy things and— and start *trying them on*,” he says, before he plants his hands into each of their backs and shoves them into the changing rooms, ignoring their complaints and whines. It’s not like either of them really knows how to put a dress on.

Phil circles around the tiny room and inspects it, trying to bide his time before he’s forced to put on the egregious amounts of fabric in his arms. There are two twin lights above his head and a dial below them, several settings meant to change the colors or brightness upon it. Across from him is a mirror, and he stares into it, cocking his head and surveying how the lights hit his feathers and how they reflect in turn. There’s just enough room for him to extend his wings outward a foot or two, and he curls them around himself as he starts shedding his clothes, conscious about being in a public place.

He discards his pants and shirt on the hooks nearby, left only in his boxers and undershirt, grimacing a little. He’s never been particularly self-conscious, but scanning his skin in the mirror across from him, he can’t help but see how many *scars* the dress is going to expose. He slips a hand across a particularly big one — a thick line across his chest where a spider had cut through his skin like butter, killing him and sending him back into an inhabited world.

It’s puckered and long, the middle a deep burgundy where the poison had shot through him and the spider’s fangs had dug the deepest. He remembers those few paralyzing moments where he’d prayed for his wife’s forgiveness — and then nothing.

Nothing— until he’d woken up in some random field hospital at the tail end of a war and had been put to work. It’s an unsightly thing. A memory of a fantastical world that he had spent so many years building, and then lost within one single second, one stupid mistake.

Phil sneers at it and yanks his undershirt off, unwilling to dwell on the topic any longer.

The dress is long and complicated. The back is open, the sleeves slit at the elbows yet long enough to trail around his calves. He starts with stepping inside the middle, tugging it over his legs and carefully shimmying it up to his chest. Then, he takes the top and hooks it across his neck, the mock turtleneck snapping shut behind his hair. His wings flex and strain, but are blissfully unrestrained, cool air whipping across his bare back when he flaps them.

The base of the dress shifts around his feet, bare and cold against the ground. It’s that same mossy green as the rest of it. It folds into several small lines of gems, though, silvery-white things that twist and swim in patterns of angelic shape and form. They shine when he turns, the lace against his legs cool and soft.

“S’ not the most uncomfortable thing ever!” He calls out of his room, picking each of his legs up and stomping around, shaking the fabric of the dress around, letting his sleeves fall down his arms and twirl about his sides.

“I uh. Can’t even. Uhm...”

A long pause. Phil waits for Techno to speak again. Then, he hears the man's dressing room door creak open, and he sees light golden fabric swish against the ground.

When he steps out, Techno's jaw *drops*.

"I— uh—" Phil says, a wide grin stretching across his face as he looks at his friend, stunned in turn. It's clear that Techno's problem is that he can't tie his corset, but it doesn't ruin the silhouette of the dress in the slightest. It's sleeveless, the coiled muscle of his arms exposed, a strange contrast to the gentle and light figure of his dress. His adam's apple bobs just above the collar of the dress, and he lets out a nervous chuckle, swinging around in a circle, the world going up in shades of silver and gold. The dress is already cinched around his muscular waist, but the thin black ribbon of the corset is untied and loose, shoulders twisting as they try to gain purchase across it. "You look fuckin' *cool*, mate."

"You don't clean up too bad yerself, old man," rumbles Technoblade, taking a step backward as Phil grabs the ribbons on his corset, starting to pull them tight. It isn't the first time his co-emperor has worn something like this, so he simply twists his nimble and blackened fingers through the ribbon, pulling it taught until the hybrid within Phil's grasp lets out a wheeze. "Hh— oh, *man*—"

"Done!" Phil replies cheerily, smacking Technoblade on the shoulder, listening to his friend hiss and letting out a laugh. When the piglin hybrid turns back around again, though, his face is again one of astonishment.

They stand there for a long few seconds, Techno blinking as he scans Phil's dress, a grin slowly spreading across his face. He steps forward, taking one of the avian's gratuitous sleeves in his claws, swinging it around a little.

"I take it I don't look the worst in it?" Phil says, pretending to pose vainly, fluttering his eyelashes before he lets out a loud laugh.

"Nah, you look damn *good*," Techno replies in turn, looking slightly breathless. He's one to talk, Phil thinks. With his pink hair flushed in the light, his eyes a sparkling, crimson tide, his grin just about the most familiar thing the avian can think of. "I hope Kristin is watchin', she'll probably go *nuts* for this."

"You think?" Phil says, his smile dropping into something a bit more embarrassed, a bit more self-conscious. He spins a little, letting out a little *bwoosh* as the train twists against the ground.

Techno scoffs incredulously and grabs Phil by the shoulders, leaning over to bonk his head into the smaller man's skull. When he looks back up, he laughs, as if Phil questioning his words is the most insane thing ever. "You two are probably the most fancy-lookin' couple in the universe when you wanna be. I bet if you died right now, she wouldn't be too mad."

"I don't know about *that*." He grabs the skirt of Techno's dress and picks it up a little, swishing it around and hopping back and forth on bare feet, sharp and playful trills falling from his throat when Techno lets out a soft *chuff* of fondness, like an old cat waiting for a kitten to stop pestering it. "Kristin usually gets on my ass about gettin' close to death, mate."

“Who?”

In their distraction, neither had noticed the final door swinging open. Peter lets out a sharp, admiring gasp at the sight of his shopping buddies, running over and trailing his hands over the skirts of their dresses. “*Woah! Holy shit! You guys look so cool, oh my gosh—*”

The kid himself is dressed in something a lot more simple than their elaborate dresses. It’s a red dress, the top a much less revealing form, landing just at the base of his throat, the sleeves poofy with tulle on his shoulders. The skirt itself doesn’t seem to very big, but when he spins, it billows up and spins with him.

“You look like some teenager’s date to a ball,” Phil says teasingly, reaching forward and prodding the puffed-up sleeves on his shoulders. When Peter pouts, he laughs. “No— no it’s a good thing! You look *cute*, mate!”

“Be nice.” Techno steps forward and inspects Peter with squinted eyes, pretending to be scrutinous and intense. Then, he grins a razor-sharp grin, and nods approvingly. “*Bloody* looking.”

Phil slaps him on the arm for that. “No indoctrinating the kid, Techno. Not unless you want Stark up our ass about it.”

They continue to chat about their dresses for a few minutes. The emperors let Peter swish their skirts around, squealing in joy and laughing whenever the trains threaten to trip them up. Phil threatens to strangle the kid with his sleeves if he makes fun of them — but the grin Peter gives him in return makes him think his words have fallen on empty ears.

After a while, though, it’s clear that Peter had heard the tail end of their earlier conversation, and his interest is caught, persistent in the way he tries to tug the conversation back to the topic. In the end, fed up, he leverages Phil with a slightly desperate expression and asks:

“Who is Kristin?”

Phil’s first impulse is to simply say “*My life.*” His *reason*. It would be the truth. As much as Techno is his main reason for continuing on in this life, Kristin is his main reason for *everything*. She is the flowers he picks and breathes life into. She is every feather he sheds and burns. She is the very fabric of his universe, and though he is no longer in the world he was born into, he can still feel her hands around his soul, carrying him through his darkest moments.

That’s a bit complicated to explain to a human teenager from a different world, though. So, he settles on the simple explanation.

“My wife,” he says, his smile going from excited to fond. To *warm*, like a crackling fireplace or the warmth of a good hug. “The woman I love.”

“Also Death,” Techno pipes up, pointing to the ground with one finger. “Very much so Death.”

“She’s—“ Peter goes pale. “Oh. Oh, Philza. I’m so sorry for your loss.”

It doesn’t register for a second. Then, Phil bursts out laughing, bowing over and snorting into his knees. When he finally has the strength to leverage himself out and look at Peter, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes, the poor kid looks absolutely *mortified*. So he steps forward, putting one hand on his shoulder and smiling that same soft smile as before.

“Nah, mate. Nothin’ to be sorry about. She’s not *dead*. She’s *Death*,” he explains, stressing the capitalization, the importance. “Like, Lady Death. Have I never explained my nickname?”

“Uh.” Peter swallows visibly. “No?”

“Techno calls me The Angel Of Death for a reason, kiddo.” He looks back up at the piglin hybrid to see him nodding. “She’s not only my wife— she’s— also an employer of sorts?”

Silence. Peter seems *very* confused, raising a hand and scanning it and murmuring, as if sectioning out the conversation and attempting to rearrange it into something that makes better sense. He nods, very slowly, though it looks as if he still doesn’t really get it.

“Wade says he’s married to death too?” He mumbles to himself, making Phil bristle in indignance — Kristin is *his* wife whom he loves, thank you very much. Then, in a more obvious voice. “I mean. I may not get it, but I am not gonna call you a liar, Mr. Craft, sir.”

“Lying about what?”

Well. That’s convenient. Phil just about jumps into the heavens as he twirls around, feeling rather sparkly and impressive when his dress swirls around him. There stand them all — Sam, Steve, and Natasha, who stands in the back and shrugs.

“I couldn’t keep em off forever, Spiderling.”

When Phil looks behind his shoulder to Peter, he starts to gather that getting him and Techno into dresses was their intention the whole time. Peter deflates. “Aw. Man. Please don’t arrest me Mr. America.”

“I—“ Steve sighs and massages his forehead, glaring. “I’m not going to *arrest* any of you.”

“Not unless you steal a dress,” chimes Sam, arms folded over each other and a killer disappointed look sprawled across his face. If Phil was intimidated by anyone here, he might even have cared. “Or continue to be little conniving shits.”

“I don’t know what that word means so I’m going to ignore it!” Peter gestures at Phil and Techno and their elaborate gowns. “Look! Charity cases!”

—

They try on more and more dresses for the better half of several hours. Once they’ve started, it’s too funny to stop. Techno tries on several gowns that become miniature on him, almost having to rip them to get them on. Phil really likes some of the silken dresses — for their

ability to move around his wings — and so he tries those while Natasha picks out jewelry for them to both dazzle themselves in. Technoblade ends up trying on so many necklaces his neck seems to get heavy.

Peter stays in the same dress for the beginning before trying on a selection of suits. Sam gets into a single dress — apparently he lost a bet to Clint — though he looks miserable in it. Steve doesn't try anything on because he's a party killer. Natasha runs through about 16 dresses in five minutes, and when asked how, only says that she has experience in quick changes.

Overall it's not a bad experience. In fact, it's weirdly *fun*. Phil finds that dresses aren't the worst thing to wear ever, even if he knows he's gotta wear shorts under them if he wants to fly. Techno seems to like them too, even if he tries to hide it behind sneers. Phil wonders if it might be because he misses letting his hooves legs out in the air rather than confined in pants at all times. It's just *nice*.

That is until the screams start.

The lights go black. There's a sound like a tnt explosion in their ears, feet away, accompanied by both angry and fearful shouting. Not far off, someone starts to wail. Someone else starts to sob.

Something slams into Phil. He hears Natasha instruct him to stay down. He hears Techno grunt in pain as he too crashes to the ground, Steve slamming him into the floor so that they can better avoid the— *the*—

The bullets.

Phil's blood runs cold.

Guns are not necessarily *rare* in his life. He has used and held them himself, even if his weapon of choice will always be the sword or the bow. They can be quite useful in a pinch, but that doesn't mean that *anyone* uses them very often. Even Techno and his most brutal enemies typically just resorted to beating the shit out of them — or on a bad day, stabbing them with swords. Guns are not *rare*. That doesn't mean they are used liberally.

Hearing them in a middle of this store is enough for his heart to jump to his throat, his hand instinctively reaching out for Technoblade's to reassure himself that his partner is still ok. In the dark, though, he can't see anything.

After a few seconds of nothing but the angry shouting of the shooters, Phil is able to wriggle out from under Natasha, who lets him. Techno is already sitting up as well, bright red eyes finding and latching onto Phil's own despite the absence of light anywhere around them. Peter is—

Peter—

Peter is gone.

“*Kid?*” Phil hears Natasha whisper, head turning to where the boy was behind him only minutes before. Her breath quietly hitches when she realizes he isn’t there, though it’s hard to tell she’s distressed at all. “*Shit. They took the kid.*”

“*They?*” Techno says with alarm. “*What the hell is happenin’?*”

“*A shooting or something. Sam, get Tony on the line. Have him call up your suit or send something down here.*” Steve cuts off with a sharp gasp as more shots ring out, this time right into the ceiling, shards of marble clattering against the ground as the bullets slam into them. “*Tell him to hurry. I’m heading out.*”

There’s a pause, and rustling, and then more quiet. Sam curses. “*Wait— hold on, Steve. Where the hell are the offworlders?*”

—

Phil’s footsteps are silent despite the train of the dress behind him. This one must be for some sort of wedding — but there’s a golden lace corset across his stomach and a neckline dressed in swirls stopping right at his chin. It’s not the most convenient getup, but at least his feet are bare. Technoblade is beside him in a more unprofessional dress, a short deep black gothic thing with long bell sleeves and a few layers of red tulle beneath it all. The only sound to accompany the either of them as they follow the blood and gunshots is the soft sweeping of delicate fabric against the floors.

Looking up, Phil receives a quick twitch of the head to the left indicative of an order, Techno telling him to run with only that movement. There’s no time to nod as he silently scurries across the aisle, eyes darting about as they search for the group of hostages and the gunmen nearby.

There. He throws a hand out and wordlessly gestures for Techno to follow and look. Across the aisle, just barely hidden behind rows and rows of clothes, is a small line of shaking, frightened civilians. Peter isn’t there. But suddenly, his voice can be heard.

“You don’t want us as hostages,” he says, and his voice is steady and light as if he’s joking with a friend, not negotiating with grown men in guns who have already injured at least one person. “We’re all like— poor, and we all work here, I promise our money isn’t worth it—”

“Shut the fuck *up!*” Growls some out of sight force, accompanied by a *slam* and a soft, stifled groan. *Peter’s* groan. Phil watches as the kid slumps, finally in view, gripping his stomach as he slides down on the wall.

“Wow. That was— super uncalled for, man,” he replies weakly, gripping at his gut. Internally, Phil begs for the kid to shut the fuck up before someone else makes him.

There’s no response to his words though. The unseen men pace around and suddenly they are there in Phil’s vision — bulky, dressed in black, *shaking*. They’re scared. They’re *amateurs*.

One of them kicks Peter’s stomach again as he continues to ramble. Phil sees red.

He's grabbing a purse off a rack before anything can stop him. His intuition is good enough to know that his friend is advancing in the same manner. They shift across the ground with soft *fwip, fwip*, noises, their dresses feeling light as air with the strength of their rage holding them up.

They make it to the end of the aisle. One of the kidnappers come close. *Too* close.

Phil wraps the strap of the bag around the man's hand and yanks it down, a satisfying yelp exploding from his pathetic lips as his gun drops and talons grip into his arm, digging through the soft skin and drawing spurts of blood that splash across the nearby clothes. He's spun around and then a leg raises out of a *wedding dress*, a bare foot landing on his back and forcing him down to the ground beneath it. The thin leather strap of that bag goes around his *neck*, now, and he tries very hard to scream, though it is very futile.

The other man is up and pointing his gun into the clothes in an instant. It's almost too easy as Techno rushes out, tackling the man and gripping the barrel of the gun, crushing it into garbage and smoke as if it is made only of *paper*. The hand gripping the gun grabs the man's arm instead, yanking it so far backward that bone *pops* and voice *screams*.

Someone else shouts in fear. Phil releases the bag around the man's neck when he goes and collapses into the ground. Blood drips off his fingers and onto the ground. Techno's hoof swings upward and slams into the other man's head. He falls. His scream cuts off.

"What. The. *Fuck*."

Phil whirls around. There stands Sam, eyes wide in confusion, mouth open as the last of his surprised words cut off. Someone runs past him — Steve falls at Peter's side, gently and quietly asking him if he's alright.

"I. Uh." Techno puts his hands up as if feigning innocence. The man beneath him moans. The lights flicker on, and blood is smeared across the floor where the unmoving figure beneath him slammed into it. "It was an accident?"

There's a long silence. Sam and Natasha seem to be attempting to understand the magnitude of the lie.

"Definitely an accident," Phil says, dropping his purse, releasing the purpling neck of the asshole under his foot. "I don't know how this happened or where it came from."

"No sir," Technoblade continues, stepping away from the body and shuffling closer to one of the hostages. "I was just. Bein' kidnapped over here. I did not do anything."

Suddenly one of the men from the checking counter gets up to his feet, swaying slightly from fright, and yanks Techno's hand into his own. "You saved us!" He gasps, ruining their already extremely flimsy cover. "God bless you, sirs, God bless you, I thought we were *dead*!"

Phil's hope for their lie dwindles. Steve Rogers *glares*.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, they dropkicked those criminals in self defense!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This chapter is pure fluff!/gen I really hope you guys enjoy it, I've missed making these boys super happy <3 they deserve it

“What were you two *thinking*?”

Technoblade rolls his eyes, crossing his arms across his chest and itching lightly at the uncomfortable dress straps strung across his shoulders. In the end they only has enough time to pay for the dresses they were wearing, the ones they'd first tried on, and a random selection of clothes Steve, Sam, and Natasha had picked out while they were off wearing flouncy ball gowns. This, unfortunately, proves to be a mistake. How does anything stay in this large of a dress for so long?

“We were *thinking*,” snarls Phil beside him, positioned on the back of the couch and looming over Techno despite their difference in height. “That a kid had just gotten nabbed by a bunch of dumb motherfuckers and that we had an *opening*.”

“Which we did,” Techno says casually. “I knew their blind spot. What, did you want us to sit around and ignore the fact that nerds with guns were going after Peter? *Bruh*.”

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose. There isn't actual anger in his expression — Techno would likely have his sword out if there was — there's just an annoying amount of *disappointment*, as if Phil and him can't just handle themselves alone.

“It's not *about that*. You two are civilians — and if anything went wrong and either of you were hurt, that would be *on us*.” Steve's hand strays from his forehead, instead wrapping around his other arm until they're criss crossed. Techno feels a bit as if he's being chastised by a particularly brave general back home, willing to go against their emperor's orders. “I know you two had power back in your home world, but here on this earth, you can't resort to vigilante justice. No offense, Peter.”

“Not much taken, sir,” replies the kid. He's currently perched on a kitchen chair behind them, Stark hovering over him and fussing. Someone named May Parker — some sort of guardian of the boy's — is apparently set to arrive soon, and she did *not* appear pleased over the phone.

“Right.” Steve nods. If Technoblade were only a bit more trusting of the man before him, he might've seen the worry displayed in the Captain's expression. As of right now, all he can see is disappointment.

There's a clatter from the kitchen. Turning around just in time reveals Stark slamming a first aid kit down and rolling his eyes, ripping his sunglasses off so that the petty expression of rebellion can be seen. "Lay off them, Capsicle. They did what you would have done, right? Even when you *were* just a skinny little twig."

Steve flushes a little. It's clear he's been beat, though, because he uncrosses his arms and sighs, running his hands through his blond hair and then letting out a groan that implies he knows he's about to admit defeat. "I *know* I would. But I'm an Avenger now, Stark. We can't let offworld civilians put themselves at risk for the sake of—"

Suddenly, the elevator door slides open. There is no friendly ding. There is no Jarvis, ready to introduce whoever is inside. Instead, out from the condensed room, steps a fiery-haired and very angry looking young woman in heels.

"*Peter!*" She shouts, voice somehow both desperate and angry at once. Her bespectacled eyes race around the room till they land on the kid, sporting a black eye and holding an ice pack around his middle. The woman — presumably May Parker — gasps and goes running over, cupping Peter's cheeks and tilting his head every which way. "Oh, Pete, what the *hell* happened?"

"Your nephew—"

"Shut your mouth, Stark!" She snaps, though there's not much heat behind it. The target of her ire merely snorts, suggesting that this is not at all a rare occurrence. Peter laughs tiredly, reaching his hands up to take hers off his face, instead holding them gently on his lap.

"I'm ok, May," he says softly, in a voice that is suddenly very gentle. The woman scoffs at this, a fond glare spreading across her face and roosting there like an old, crotchety bird. "Really! I'll heal up soon. They didn't land many hits."

"And I bet you beat them all to bits then, didn't you?" Reaching up, she ruffles his hair until it's a messy, tangled nest. Peter reaches up with a groan and repositions it before shaking his head.

The room goes silent as several people remember one thing. Technoblade and Phil, despite probably breaking numerous laws, *saved* Peter, his own powers be damned.

May Parker seems to gather this. She lets out a soft, breathless noise, her eyes tracing the foreigners on the couch. Techno watches as Phil recoils, still crouched on the back of the couch, and he does so as well, shrinking under the oddly scrutinizing look she has, the fierce way she carries herself. Perhaps it isn't that she's intimidating — but her aura — her *strength* — seems to drift out in waves.

"You?" She wonders aloud, nodding her head at Techno and Phil, who return it with the same gesture. It's awkward. It's too quiet. It's—

She smiles warmly, all severeness immediately vacating her expression and replaced by a pure, genuine thankfulness. Hands drawing away from Peter, she walks toward them, holding out her arm as if waiting for them to shake it.

Phil takes it first. He uncurls from his perch, one arm pressed into the top of the couch and the other coming forward, his inhuman hand wrapping around her own, shaking it up and down uncertainly.

“Thank you,” she says brightly as she moves on to Techno, not commenting on his clawed, thick fingers. He nods.

“We may be up for a little morally *messy* crime occasionally, but it’s all honorable, ma’am,” he says, tone dry and thick with dull, impenetrable humor. He doesn’t expect it, but the woman laughs, tipping her head back and letting out a single light *ha!*

“I like you,” she says before she pulls away. “And you’re up for a little disrespect sometimes too, I assume?”

When realizing the question is for him, Phil nods vigorously, sending her a large toothy grin. “Always am. Always up for a little shitheadery, I am.” He steadily ignores Steve’s protest at his language. “But since the Captain is *Mr. Fuckin’ Crime Police*—” he ignores the indignant shout he’s given for that as well “—I’ve had to tone it down.”

“*We’ve* had to tone it down,” Techno corrects, never one to be excluded from a tally of crimes. Especially not when they include ones that Phil is doing. Phil’s crimes are *fun*. “Which, I mean— fair enough, we’re sorta not supposed to exist, but that’s such a *fun killer*-“

“Yes, making sure you two don’t get arrested is such a fun killer-“

Tony’s jaw drops. “You are *not* one to talk, Mr. Captain *I illegally enlisted in the army!*” He scoffs, throwing his hands up like this is the most offensive thing that anyone has ever done.

“You did *what?*” Shrieks Peter in return, clapping his hands over his cheeks in the same fake-offended manner. “Oh my gosh, Aunt May, my icon is a *criminal*, is a dirty criminal-“

Tony’s *I thought I was your icon* goes steadily ignored. Techno and Phil both snicker to themselves, watching as the remaining two Avengers in the room bicker back and forth while Peter is escorted out under the promise of being forced to nap. It’s then that Techno realizes — he’s pretty much *exhausted*. Trying on a ridiculous amount of dresses and then proceeding to fight armed robbers and then proceeding to get yelled at — it’s just a little bit draining. Just a *little bit*.

“I think that’s our queue to leave, mate,” Phil says, lips quirked up into a fond smile as he leaps off the couch, pressing a hand to Techno’s shoulder.

“Nap time,” Techno says, and he is not contested. Then— a groan. “Aw, *bruh*— do we have to take the dresses off first? They’re so *complicated*. ”

“At least that one doesn’t have a corset.” A snicker sounds out when Techno smacks Phil lightly on the shoulder. “Naw, mate, I’ll help you out of it. Big bad emperor Technoblade can’t get a few ribbons undone?”

“You’re one to *talk*, ” he replies with a grouchy snort. “I’ve seen your wings get tangled in one too many cloaks, old man—“

He’s cut off by a hand slapping over his mouth and shoving him backward when Phil hops into the elevator. The doors start to close — Techno only just barely shoves his way through, letting out a curse.

“Oh, you’re *on*. ”

After about thirty seconds of playful wrestling, Phil is trapped in a headlock and squawking angrily as Techno roughly rubs at his head. “I give up! I tap out! Argh— get the fuck off’a me, mate!” The doors slide open onto their floor with a *ding*, and Techno drags the avian out, still in the headlock, only to be shoved onto the ground when Phil kicks his shin. “Aha! Take that— *wah!*”

He screeches as Techno grabs him by one leg and then *throws* him upward, standing all the while, until Phil is slung over his shoulder, kicking his back and swinging his wings around until they smack over and over into Techno’s head.

The piglin hybrid just laughs, carrying Phil through their floor and letting out triumphant noises every time the man seems to go limp and give up. It never sticks, though — the moment Phil hears Techno laugh he starts fighting again, his pride boiling with every second.

“You’re a fuckin- you’re a *prick*-“

“And yer a big ole loser,” Techno says with a goofy grin, before he pants Phil’s head — stuck upside down on his chest as he’s carried, his view that of the buttons on Techno’s shirt. The avian growls, slamming his fists into Techno’s chest over and over, but there’s no real power behind the repetitive hits.

Once they make it to one of the relatively untouched bedrooms, Techno pulls Phil off his shoulder and instead into his arms, held up like a frustrated cat, squirming all the while. He glares, making to start hissing insults — when he’s *thrown*, slammed down into the bed as Techno drops him limply into the pile of blankets below. The entire thing goes to shit in seconds, Phil’s wings flapping in an attempt to catch him, but it’s futile, only wrapping the blankets up all around him. Techno lets out a loud laugh and staggers backward, clutching his stomach at the sight of the prestigious Angel of Death gets defeated by a mangled pile of *bedclothes*.

“You— I’m gonna fuckin’ kill you, Techno, I’ll rip your throat out with my *teeth*—“

“Good luck gettin’ tall enough to reach me.”

Another angry screech. A hand claws its way out of the blanket and swipes at him — but he’s so far away it misses him easily.

He lets Phil struggle for a good few minutes, laughing all the while, trying to keep from actually *giggling* at the ridiculous sight of his friend growing increasingly more trapped in

blankets. Eventually, though, the mass of sheets stills, and Techno hears a meek little coo appear from deep within.

“Alright, alright,” he mutters, still letting out sharp whistling wheezes as he steps forward and starts to help Phil unwind from the blankets. “Sit still, let me just—“

He yanks one blanket, hard. Phil goes tumbling out and onto the bed again, panting, face flushed and hair tangled into knots. They stare at each other for a long time.

Then, they start *howling*.

It’s hard to hold back their laughter now, when Phil is bent into himself and practically *sobbing*, Techno wheezing so hard he has to lean down and clutch the edge of the bed. This ultimately fails, making him trip and fall down on top of Phil, crushing the avian so hard he just laughs *harder*.

They lie there in a pile of torn and tangled cloth, laughing into each other's forms, unable to move for the fear of cramping up. Eventually, Phil gets the strength to shove Techno off — instead tugging him to the side, shoving his *own* head into the piglin hybrid’s broad chest and covering his face with his talons. Techno just rolls over until Phil is on top of him, still chuckling, patting his partner’s shoulder with one shaking claw, still twitching with mirth and overexertion.

“Ohhhh, man,” he sighs, tucking Phil’s head beneath his own, still wheezing a little. “Oh man. I’m really not gonna be able to get this dress off now.”

“S’ so shiny,” Phil says, before letting out another hiccuping giggle and scratching at the sequins in front with one claw. Techno runs his hand over the front of his own chest, feeling the sparkling material flip up and down under his hand.

“Woah,” he replies softly, reverently. “It is.”

Both of them are so utterly exhausted that suddenly, all humor is lost to the obsessive tugging at the sequins on Techno’s dress. A flurry of curious chirps come from Phil as he sits up, poking and prodding at his own skirt and the iridescent sparkles set into the lace.

“Man. Humans kinda know how to make cool clothes.”

“Their only redeeming quality,” Techno jokes. He pulls Phil back down onto his chest, ignoring the protests he’s given. “Mmm. Sleepy.”

“I am *not* tired. Get off me, you asshole.”

“No.”

“*Techno.*”

“I’m *tired*, Phil,” he whines, shutting his eyes and slumping back on the bed. “This is the ultimate betrayal. I fought robbers today, Philza Craft. Let me sleep, Philza, you evil evil man —“

“*Fine! Fine,*” Phil concedes, humming out a laugh of his own and lying back down on Techno’s chest. It’s clear he doesn’t actually have the energy to protest, cooing softly as soon as Techno starts to purr.

Blissfully warm, Techno allows himself to relax. He doesn’t sleep — not at first. He lets himself slip into a trancelike state, the quiet and the comfort and the pressure on his chest all aiding in helping his head go blissfully empty. Even chat is quiet — only occasionally mimicking the soft bird-like noises Phil lets out as the avian falls asleep, or telling Techno to fall asleep. Every once in a while one of them gets louder, but the rest all tell them to — and he quotes this — *shut the fuck up and let the idiots sleep*. At least, that’s more or less what he gathers.

Pretty quickly, Phil’s knees curl up into his waist and his coos turn into very quiet snores, his mouth falling open as he falls asleep, his hand still lying on the back of Techno’s neck where he’d been massaging the bits of pink fur there. So, Technoblade allows himself to sleep as well, eyes sliding shut and purr going silent as he slips into a wonderful state of rest, Phil in his arms and warmth between his ribs.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!! New chapter-- but this one is special!! This one was requested by the lovely [@KneeCapsStolen](#) on twitter. Thank you so much again for requesting this absolutely awesome idea, I had so much fun writing these dickheads in Asgard <3

And for anyone who may be interested in "requesting" (I can't say the actual word) fics from me like this in the future, whether it be for a chapter of an existing fic or a whole new idea: here are my [details!](#)

Anyways: Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rain in New York is pretty at first. Or— from a distance. It hurls itself as uncaring soldiers planted only to color the buildings around them with watercolor saturation. Everything becomes lit up as grey clouds shroud the land, tiny stars far below the Avenger's tower windows. The people become lumpy black shadows, umbrellas making them look like multicolored balloons against the wet concrete.

But after a while, the true ugliness of rain appears. Massive muddy puddles, people splashing other people with wet, fetid water for no apparent reason. Rats circling drains and leaves clogging grates. People slipping on slick sidewalks and the scent of mold and petrichor.

Even so, it isn't all bad. Apparently, Peter Parker likes to make the most of it, as he tugs Phil and Techno along Queens New York, showing them all sorts of local shops and bow-day-gas. Bodegas? They've both received several sandwiches, a pint of ice cream, many many friendly attacks from bodega cats, and some random half-stale packs of sweet candy. Sure, Phil looks a little silly with his wings buried under his jacket and Techno's tail keeps slipping out of his pants, but no one really pays attention to it.

Oil that spills from cars makes all the rainy puddles shine like rainbows. This is something Phil has begun to observe, and he always takes a few seconds to pause and watch the water swirl and shine whenever he passes one such shallow pool. This means he pauses quite often — because many cars round here have leaks.

There's no rainbow in the sky, though. No sun peaks through the heavy clouds, almost black on the horizon as night starts to fall. In some ways, it makes Phil miss the Northern lights. That beautiful spectacle of Aurora Borealis, twisting through the sky like some dance of the spirits, as if ghosts have risen and decided to return all at once. Rainbows aren't very common in New York, apparently.

“Oh— huh.”

Phil is startled into looking over at Techno, squinting into the sky, staring at a sudden part in the clouds. He himself had been distracted by a particularly large puddle — but now, his eyes are caught, trained upon an oddly perfect cylinder of clear, blue sky.

“That doesn’t look right,” mutters Peter at their side, craning his neck upward as he starts to ignore his sandwich. Suddenly, that oval of perfect blue is expanding, as if someone has stuck their hands through the clouds and scooped them right up, slowly parting that grey covering with their fingers. The kid’s eyes widen. “Hey— wait, is that the B—”

The world *implodes*.

The ground trembles for only an instant before it cracks and snaps and warps into intricate symbols of no *natural* — no *right* — origin. Colors that can’t possibly exist circle that awful rune and spark like flames, an unnatural scream. Eyes flicker open and shut and then *open*, pointed directly at Phil and Technoblade as if to call them *trespassers*.

Inky black nothingness. All the wrong stars and all the wrong souls and all the wrong people, sticking to Phil’s every inch of skin, forcing him to scream yet not allowing a single word to come out. The End of the world and the beginning of the End and then— *and suddenly*—

His knees buckle as he hits solid ground, a scream bursting from within him and then swallowed down just as quickly. Phil lands, only managing to steady himself enough to sit there on his hands and knees, breathing heavily and quickly into the material beneath him. His talons curl. *Metal...?*

Then, suddenly, there are hands around his elbows and yanking him off the ground, forcing him to stand and drawing a surprised yelp from his throat. He hears a familiar snarl not far away as some twin hands put themselves on Technoblade in turn, but the two of them are already fighting, hardly processing the information coming from the other.

Phil’s wings swing out, hitting several flesh bodies, capturing their shouts as they fall or stumble backward. He whirls around in an instant, a blade drawn from nowhere, a shout — “*Sorcery!*” — as the silvery black weapon becomes reality. He sees his targets rather than the people they are. A massive, hulking beast of a man — already engaged by Technoblade. Two much smaller beings but no less armed to the teeth, and Phil snarls as he advances upon them in turn.

One wields a rapier. The other, a mace, and Phil’s first move is to dive beneath said weapon, wings held so flush to his bodies that the bones bend and creak. For a moment the one with the rapier looks victorious as he thrusts it outward— until the hit is thrown away by a vicious strike with Techno’s own axe.

Phil sends him a grateful nod and covers his partner’s back in turn, wings flapping open and managing to startle the other, ax-wielding and hulking man into stumbling backward. His size doesn’t diminish his strength, though, because as Technoblade slams a mace away the larger man slams the butt end of his axe into Phil’s side, *throwing* him into the air.

He chokes down a shout of pain at the feeling of something within him bending, snapping. His wings snap open and flap frantically as suddenly he’s falling into an empty void, nothing

but the eyes of the stars to watch his descent.

For a split second, air catches feathers and the universe screams.

Then Phil is up in the air, Technoblade's shout of his name heard as he flies right back onto the shimmering bridge they're fighting on. Shades of illustrious and dazzling rainbow cascade all across the air. Phil's feet meet solid ground just in time for him to land a heavy blow to the side of the mace-wielding man, blood spraying across the ground and onto his own wings.

"Takes more than that to take me down!" He shouts triumphantly as he leans backward so far his hair brushes the ground, one hand thrown downward until it just barely skirts across the ground. He's rocketing back up in seconds in a dizzying move, a shield materializing in the crook of his left elbow as he catches an axe within it.

Techno rolls forward until they're standing side by side, a vicious growl torn from his lips, bright eyes narrowed as his entire body throws itself into motion. His own axe digs a deep gouge into the rainbow bridge as the largest man skids backward, a short yelp to accompany him.

Back and forth. Forward and nowhere. Blackness swirls around below them as moonlight shifts above, the stars and moon so drowned out by the battle as to be hardly there. Technoblade and Phil dance together, at each side that must be guarded, switching from wielding axes to bows to swords to shields.

When Phil's probably-broken ribs get the better of him, Techno covers him from every angle. When Technoblade is caught off guard, stumbling backward as a blade grows far too close, Phil is there to sweep his wings out and set their opponent into an unsteady miss.

A crackle of lightning. The eyes center on the sky as it splits apart and Technoblade and Philza learn why Thor is called The God of Thunder.

"What in all the realms is *going on?*" He shouts with eyes lightning-bright and hands clasped around his hammer. An awful electricity crackles at Phil's back, making his feathers stand on end, something like a bird's instinctual fear of rainfall creeping up the nape of his neck and roosting upon his shoulder. Thor's boots make heavy thuds as he lands on the bridge, their three opponents suddenly pausing.

The rapier-weilder steps forward. He has the audacity to merely shove Technoblade's axe to the side, now that they've all suddenly paused. "Sorcery! Trickery! Odin ordered—"

"I know what my father ordered!" Thor advances upon the maced man and thumps him in the head with his gloved fist. "You're meant to peacefully capture them, not try to *murder them.*"

That gets Phil a little bit more confused. "Hey— hey now, you're trying to do fuckin' *what now?*"

"Capture you," Thor responds cheerily, as if this is entirely normal and ok. Phil takes a step back, chuckling nervously, echoed by the blase snort Technoblade lets out beside him. "Oh,

come on! What's a little friendly interrogation between friends?"

"I'd argue it would make us *not friends*," says Technoblade as he draws his sword, holding it straight out. Phil's hands curl around a bow and arrow, his eyes narrowing until they bore right into his possible target. Thor's *chest*.

This is exactly what he's been so afraid of since the beginning of their stay in this foreign world. A sudden betrayal, a switching of hands, a twisting of words. They'd been *safe*. Safe for so long, in fact, that Phil feels as if he'd rather foolishly shed most of his guard with the tantalizing promises of warmth and flight and friendship.

But now, here they are. In another all-too foreign land, a group of four people — one of which they'd begun to *trust*, as stupidly as it had been placed — advancing upon them in an attempt to *capture them*?

For *what*? To be taken and plucked of feathers and fur and to be tested, by clinical men who only want to see what makes a bird *tick*, a piglin *fight*? By people who want to hear songs and screams and see what color blood lies beneath thick black *wings*—?

Thor runs forward, hammer in hand. The battle continues.

This time, Phil and Techno fight with renewed vigor. The urgency of their situation is getting stronger by the second, and they swing their weapons with so much more force, arrows quickly starting to run out as they are flung, over and over, into shields or shoulders or arms, never quite hitting the marks they need to.

But they fight onwards anyways, and somehow, they're *not losing*.

It's clear that the other side is no longer fighting to kill, but does that matter anymore? Perhaps leaning into the sweet embrace of his lover is preferable to whatever awaits them, be it chains or torture or even more betrayal. Technoblade is clearly of the same opinion, teeth grit and eyes shining *far* too brightly with both blood-lust and an intense desire to *win*.

And, if for only a brief moment, they are allowed hope.

Then there's a whistling sound and a sharp pain in Phil's back, right behind his wings. He freezes, as do the others, and one hand rids itself of its shield for a single moment to palm at the foreign thing stuck into his skin. It's sharp and metal and thin.

The sword in his hand should not be this heavy. His eyes should not be slowly fluttering shut, his mouth falling slack around a weak cry of fear. Technoblade's legs should not be folding beneath him as one clawed hand lands on the ground. It too, slips, sliding until Phil's partner has his chin slammed into the ground, his body collapsing to the side behind him.

"T— Tech— *fuck*—" Phil manages to gasp out, still reaching for the dart in his back. His own knees buckle, a sharp pain going through him as his injured ribs shift, something awful and painful shooting through his chest. He gasps— and then *gags*, falling backward with a thump and a weak cry of pain. He can see Technoblade's mouth moving around his name,

can hear him saying *something* — something about Phil being injured, something like a cry for help—

But it's no use. Phil's eyes roll into his head the moment he hits the ground, vision going black as a tide of pain carries him from the shore of consciousness. He can only hope they kill him quickly.

—

Well, when he wakes up it's quite obvious he isn't dead yet.

Philza Craft knows Death. Knows Her like the back of his hand, in fact, after so long having been married to Her. He loves Her, too, even though he knows he is not fated to die so soon. He has work to be done and a dumbass friend to be a dumbass with.

But here, even with his eyes closed, Phil knows that he is not dead. His ribs are sharp with agony, and he knows that something about his breathing is just not quite right. The cuts and bruises from the earlier fight have been bandaged, but nothing is righted nor healed in that way that Death both fixes and ruins all.

That is the first hint. That and the sound of speaking, low and quiet, from a few feet away. Murmurs of— *"They almost beat us, you know?"* and *"We can't let them go— not if they're truly this strong,"* and even a whisper of *"I honestly wasn't sure we'd win."*

This is a secret conversation. He can use that to his advantage.

Phil remains in the space he's been allotted, unmoving, eyes shut. He listens. Listens, as the people in the room spit insults and praise alike for the battle they'd waged— and he can't help the anger in his chest at those words. Of course they hadn't won. The odds were stacked against them, and as much as Phil wants to say they could've done it...

A group of four — and at the end, five — against two. Two, yanked away from already unfamiliar territory into yet another unimaginable world. Two, fighting against someone they'd been told they could trust.

So he sits there and listens, though his body pounds with pain. If he were to open his eyes Phil is sure they'd immediately be overtaken by rings of black and white, spots dancing across them like little vindictive stars. His ribs feel as if they're pulsing alongside his heartbeat, and he can only desperately hope that whatever is wrong, it isn't fatal.

Eventually, though, the two voices begin to fade. Their footsteps do the same, until there's the sound of a door shutting, quiet, as if to not disturb Phil in his state of rest. Well, he doesn't give a *fuck* about their niceties — and so his eyes snap open, a feral snarl already bridging his teeth.

The room he is in is pale white and empty save for the bed he lies upon and the door to the outside. Phil leans up onto his elbows and ruffles his wings, wincing, sweat coursing down his forehead as his ribs are jostled. Something about them feels incredibly wrong — but he

can't stop now. He doesn't dare slow down, because one crucial detail is missing from the room. *Technoblade*.

The moment he stands, black is edging across his vision, white spots dancing across pinprick pupils, forcing him to blink his eyes rapidly in an attempt to clear them. It doesn't work. His movements are sluggish and slow, and once again, he has absolutely no clue what the hell they've dosed him with.

Stumbling to the door reveals that it is unlocked. A stupid decision on their part, but Phil's wings ruffle with glee when he finds himself able to open it. His hand slips into his inventory, his fingers brushing against a hilt of a blade, and—

And it doesn't work.

Phil attempts to tug at the knife in his inventory, pulling harder, frustration growing and quickly instead turning to fear. Why isn't it working — it *always works* —

There's a weight on his leg that he hadn't noticed before. It's large and metallic and heavy, weighing his foot down to the ground, emanating a purple glow from intricate runes. Panic exploding between his broken ribs, he pulls harder, watching as the glow grows, brighter by the moment, until a sharp pain bleeds into his talons and he's forced to yank his hand back.

They've *cuffed him*. They've cut him off from that intrinsic magic that all from his world are linked to, all the shulker boxes and weapons and armor he'd once held so closely *gone*. He looks down at his hand and realizes it looks significantly farther from his face than it once hand, and it's shaking, wavering back and forth.

It closes into a fist. *Fine*. He'll fight with what he has.

Opening the door reveals an open terrace. A long, thick sort of balcony, with golden floors and marble pillars and plants winding across every shining, glittering surface. Far below the balcony are sprawling gardens, plants of all colors and shade and shape and age scattered across and surrounded by beautifully carved fountains. The sun is high in the sky and people dressed the same as Thor or the men who attacked them wander about, sparring, chatting, strolling.

How dare they be so calm and collected when Phil and his friend have been abducted for no reason at all? When Technoblade is missing and Phil is alone, with no clue of whether his friend is still alive or not?

He leans over the balcony, glaring like a hawk into the crowds below. His talons curl into the gold surface, scraping lines into the soft metal and forcing a scream from the material. Then, suddenly, his wings twitch at the sound of footsteps, a shout of "*Stop him!*" coming from the left— and Phil *jumps*.

His legs flail beneath him for a single second as he plummets. His wings catch the air and he's swooping like a hawk to pray, kicking one leg out and slamming it into the back of some random citizen, thin and skinny and shivering in the cold. They fall quickly, a cry of fear elicited from their lips, and Phil puts a hand to the back of their neck, holding them down.

The guards stare down from the balcony, eyes filled with rage and desperation. Phil only grins, leaning down, a vulture with its corpse beneath it, hardly struggling, pants of fear and pain falling from their lips. Red hair suddenly fades, shifting, greasy black, the neck under his hands a much lighter, bluer shade, and suddenly, the guard's attention shifts.

"Loki!"

Arrows rain down. Phil shrieks and lurches to the side, catching one of the weapons in midair and snapping it in half, blue eyes chilled with rage. The man under him lets out a pitiful moan, and starts— starts to *shrink*? Starts becoming thinner, skin growing coarse and glowing an odd shade of green, and— and suddenly Phil no longer has a hostage, and he's holding a giant, writhing python in one hand.

"What the *fuck*?" He demands, tossing the snake away. The guards have begun to advance now, and Phil starts to run, only just realizing that the snake is following him. It looks wrong somehow, with deep black scales fading into a rainbow of green, every shade possible. And, as it hisses, its thin tongue forms *words*.

I can help you! It says, shrill and frightened as it slithers after Phil in the grass. He bats his wings at the snake in an attempt to get it to *go away*. Despite it being far smaller than him, his bird's instincts still do *not* like the idea of the snake chasing him. *Stop— please, for the love of Odin— I know where your friend is!*

Well. *That's* certainly promising. Phil skids to a stop and yanks the snake out of the grass, a mantra of "*Shit, shit, shit-shit-shit*" falling from his lips as the guards catch up. Finally, though, the snake winds around his arm, head resting on his bicep, and Phil's wings flap behind him, and he's in the air.

"I have a snake on my arm," he says dazedly as he flies, vision foggy with the pain in his side and also the absolute absurdity of the situation. "*I've got a fuckin' snake on my arm,*" he repeats, as said snake shouts for him to *Fly left!*

He obeys despite the absolutely ridiculous situation. Gliding, Phil feels the snake curl up, slithering upward until it *drops*, slipping itself into the avian's pocket without a word.

Once we get inside, it hisses — oh *Gods*, he's talking to a snake — *you need to keep me hidden. Good lord, thank you for destroying my disguise.*

"I can still hear your sarcasm, *dick*," Phil says to the talking snake.

What horrible language...

Phil reaches his hand into his pocket and yanks the talking snake out, baring his teeth, watching as it shrinks back in fear. He is, after all, still a bird of prey.

"I reckon you're Thor's dead, evil brother, huh? You'd better bring me to my friend or I'll turn you *right* in," he growls, shaking the *talking snake* as it hisses in fear. "*Got it? Are we clear?*"

Quite, says the talking snake, voice warbling as it is settled back into Phil's pocket. Its tiny head peaks up from the fabric pouch and surveys the surroundings, significantly less annoying and loud. *There—the castle.*

Oh gods, of course it's the castle. A glittering golden fixture in the middle of this false Asgard, nothing like the myths and legends of his home. It's seemingly unending as it glitters, and Phil can't help but think he's starting to hate monarchies.

They'll be in the throne room, I think. For the love of Asgard, don't talk to me when you're inside. You'll be on your own, but that's my part of this deal. Your boarish friend will be there.

"His name is Technoblade, you little slithery prick," Phil comments, but it's more of an offhanded growl than a furious one. The snake's head dips back into his pocket, and he flies onward, the wind bending to the will of his wings as he flaps harder and harder, faster and faster.

The castle is ever so close. The throne room is obvious. It's got a large golden balcony outside of it, and if Phil strains his ears, he can even hear voices. Shouts, perhaps, from unknown voices.

Throwing his weight forward, Phil shouts an errant battle cry as he flies into the room, feet slamming into the ground and forcing it to illicit a moaning, cracking noise. He stumbles, but regains his footing in an instant — if he has no access to weaponry, he shall simply have to pretend he does.

There are three people in the room. Thor, waving his arms about and shouting at an ancient-looking bearded man. That bearded man glares down at Thor, who is standing just next to Technoblade, who also has a cuff on his leg, but looks more miffed than frightened at this handicap.

No one can ignore the avian and his massive black wings as he shrieks and hurls himself into the room, slamming Thor to the ground as he lands on his back, the man's head *slamming* into one of the golden steps leading up to the throne. The impact has Phil's ribs screaming at him in pain, but he only leans over and grabs Thor by the back of his shirt, pretending to intimidate as he steadies himself.

"Let us go," he growls, facing the bearded man, his golden eyepatch shining in the light. He rises from his throne, eyes suddenly narrowed — not in anger, but in fascination. "Or I'll *snap his neck.*"

"You probably can't," says Thor, moaning, clutching at his head. It's bleeding steadily. Phil just slams his other foot into the man's head as a way of shushing him.

That man on the throne does not speak as he slowly advances down the stairs, feet soundless, cloak whipping out behind him. He has an aura of exhaustion to his movements, like some great beast only just awakened. There's an awful sort of wisdom in his singular eye.

But, before he can speak, Phil feels a familiar set of claws on his shoulder, and he turns around, gasping as Techno gives him a wry smile.

“It’s alright, man,” says Technoblade, unscathed and unscarred and unbruised. He doesn’t even look particularly worried any longer. Phil’s eyes search his partner’s face. All that he finds are familiar scars, slight wrinkles where the man smiles, or frowns, or even the lightest of laugh lines around his cheeks. The same tusks as always peak out from his lips, perfectly sharp and white. A clawed and thickly calloused hand comes up, and Phil is leaning into it as it presses to his cheek, instinctively cooing at the feeling of his *flock*.

The exhaustion within him isn’t sudden. It’s been there since he woke up, like a string dragging his heart further into his stomach, only overridden by a hand grasping from the other side, yanking him back into awareness. That hand is adrenaline — and a desperate, cloying *fear*. Fear not for himself, but for Technoblade, who stands here unopposed by Thor and the man upon the throne steps, and who *smiles*, nodding at Phil with open eyes.

The hand gripping his heart yanks itself away far too quickly. Every ounce of exhaustion and pain comes hurtling right back. Phil gasps weakly, a hand moving from Thor’s shirt to grip at his side, the awful sharpness of his ribs poking into things they should not be able to touch. Techno’s voice is swimming, clearly concerned as the hand slips from his cheek and steadies him by his shoulder.

It helps, but only for a moment. Phil’s knees knock together as he falls, one hand attempting to steady himself as it hits the ground. It isn’t enough. Another branch of white-hot pain strikes him through, and he must let out a shout as his vision goes black, because Technoblade answers it.

—

This time, when Phil wakes up again, he truly thinks he must be dead.

He’s so utterly warm and comfortable that that must be the only option. Every ache in his body is utterly numbed, from his recent wounds all the way to the ever-present ache in his knees that never seems to get any better. Something soft and gentle is held in his hand, brushing against his palm as his fingers twitch. Whatever he lies upon is as soft as cotton, and he lets out a soft “*mnh...*” as his head turns, sinking further into whatever it is he’s been given.

What proves to him that he isn’t dead, though, is Techno’s voice.

“Mornin’, birdbrain.”

Phil doesn’t open his eyes, but he does chuckle, squeezing the claw in his hand as his friend’s thumb continues to rub against his palm. “Hey, asshole,” he mutters right back, laughing again as his partner lets out a curse.

“You’re awful cocky for someone who just collapsed on several broken ribs,” says Techno, and Phil slowly blinks his eyes open, clearing the sleepy, dizzying warmth that makes him

want to close them and never wake up again. “Yeah, that’s right old man,” he quips, rolling his eyes. His partner looks just as uninjured as before, a soft smile stretching his lips apart.

This time, Phil is in a much more fancy-looking room. There’s a bed behind him, blankets and pillows that look as if they’re spun from gold weaved around his blissfully warm body into a nest on the ground. A desk and chair lie in the corner, a large basket full of foreign-looking yet clearly decadent foods. Sunlight sweeps through the open window, wavering slightly with the presence of leaves to shadow it.

“Where...” He clears his throat. “Where are we?”

“Well, since Thor and his dad — Odin, what a weird guy — had a screaming match and Thor finally managed to convince the dude that we should be put back on earth and marked as non-threats, we’ve been given this sweet room to rest in.” Techno lifts his spare arm and gestures around, and that’s when Phil realizes they’re both dressed in new clothes. Techno is wearing a flouncy silken button-down, iridescent white and quite pretty too. When Phil looks down, he sees that he’s wearing an open-backed and similarly thin white shirt, his slacks replaced by short brown trousers that he might’ve worn back home.

“Wait—*fuck*—” He lurches up from the nest as he remembers the snake in his jacket pocket, only to sink back down with a groan when Techno puts a hand on his sternum and firmly shoves him back. “No, mate, you don’t understand—”

“Naw. I met him too. *Bruh*. Just as much of a jerk as his family, I guess.” Techno lifts one arm and reveals a lump in his sleeve, a small tent at his wrist where a snake’s head can clearly be seen poking through. Phil breathes out a sigh and relaxes, hands twitching at his sides before they’re engulfed by Techno’s own again. “He explained some things to me, though. I’m thinkin’ I might have a new pet on my hands.”

A rattling hiss of general displeasure emanates from Technoblade’s sleeve. He shakes his arm around. The hissing goes silent.

“But we’re safe, right?” Phil says as he shuffles upward in the nest, lifting one hand to tuck a bit of Techno’s stray hair behind his ear. That ear flick, then the other, and his friend sneezes quietly. They both laugh.

“Guess they just thought we might be threats to Asgard or somethin’. Brought us up here to talk, but Thor’s... *friends*, got to us before he did.” Techno’s nose wrinkles in displeasure. But suddenly— his ears perk up, and he smiles. “Oh! But they did take the cuffs off’a us. Cmon, try grabbing something out of yer inventory.”

Oh, Phil does with *joy*. Immediately, he wrenches a dagger from his inventory and stabs it into a pillow beside him, grinning as it explodes into a pile of white down feathers. Techno laughs, letting go of his hand in favor of drawing his own, matching dagger and stabbing it into the wood of the bed behind him.

“Y’see, I stabbed that bed in self-defense, Thor,” he starts to say in a whispery, monotone voice. “It was lookin’ at me funny.”

Phil laughs out loud, tipping his head back and slipping his dagger away. “Maybe their beds shouldn’t be so weird, man! Fuckin’ . . . shifty-eyed buggers don’t know who they’re messing with!”

They sit there and laugh for several minutes, hands held together, warm and comfortable and though Phil doesn’t quite believe it — *safe*. He has absolutely no proof that Thor truly hadn’t meant Technoblade and him any harm. For now, though, he simply holds his friend’s hand a little tighter.

“Welp. I say we get out of here with our basket of complimentary kidnappin’ condolences, eh?” says Techno after a while of simply watching the sun shift outside, tilting his head toward the elaborately wrapped gift basket on the desk nearby. Phil snorts, but nods regardless, and makes to sit up.

Evidently, he hasn’t miraculously been healed from all his injuries. The moment he’s up and ready to stand, his ribs start to ache, his knees throbbing and uncomfortable from all the impacts and falls and mad dives for safety he’s taken today. Techno sees the pain in his eyes before he can conceal it, and slips an arm beneath Phil’s shoulders, tugging him up wordlessly. His legs feel as if they’re about to slide out from beneath him, but with his inventory returned, it’s easy to slip his hand out of the world and around Benehime. The cane’s handle is familiar in his clutch, small gouges where his nails have curled into it sitting there and ready for him to sink into them.

Techno half tugs him upright. From there, Phil stabs his cane into the ground, gritting his teeth in irritation as his ribs ache, his knees click angrily. A few flaps of his wings have him able to take a step, though, and quickly enough, Techno is able to let him go.

“If I see Thor in the next ten minutes, I’ll take a swipe at his big meaty ankles,” Phil says hotly, tapping the ground with his cane. It isn’t that he’s embarrassed to use it — no, he’s far past caring about what people think of him — but having to rely on it, even if for only a short amount of time, always feels dangerous.

“You do that. I won’t stop you— Chat’s still *furious*,” says Techno blandly, hoisting their overflowing basket of random pity-snacks up onto his shoulder. Then, tugging the door open, he gives Phil a short half-bow. “Shall we?”

“I think we shall,” he replies, linking arms with Techno as they step outside.

Unfortunately, Phil doesn’t get a chance to smack Thor with his cane. He has a feeling it might get him very much killed, as the man’s ridiculously dressed father is right next to him, one functional glare slit in a snakelike glare. He can see where Loki gets it from.

They’re led out to that same rainbow bridge as before, to a large copper dome at the end, which another man — dark-skinned and tall, hair coiled together and dressed in an elaborate sort of warrior’s garb — named Heimdall informs them is called the *Bifrost*. His golden eyes flash with interest that feels far too intrusive as Phil and Techno walk side by side, an odd intrigue that never brings anything good within the off-colored shapes.

“On behalf of Asgard itself,” drawls Odin lamely, none of his heart (nor ridiculously long beard) in the words. “I do apologize for your treatment. Our intention was never for any of this to get physical, and we do hope you can forgive us.”

Techno blinks, slow and drawn out. There’s a sort of sarcasm to his lashes. Phil just snorts.

“Welp. Best be getting on, I think!” Thor says, rescuing them suddenly from the awkward silence. He claps his hands together and grins, seemingly unaware of the situation when he gestures to the Bifrost. “Heimdall, if you will?”

“I will,” replies the man, drawing a sword from his sheath. Phil eyes it with distrust, wings puffing up with every move, sighing shakily when Techno’s tail wraps around his waist — some sort of comfort emanating from the soft brush of the bushy end against his side, just below his broken ribs. Heimdall walks into the Bifrost, standing directly in the middle and before an intricate altar, carved in runes that only glows when he shoves his sword within it, a soft grunt falling from his lips, the rhythm and movement practiced, reverent. “If you two would step inside, I will send you right back home.”

Techno is the one to take the first step. Phil follows, still leaning heavily on his friend, cursing the fact that Thor’s friends apparently decided to target *him* rather than Techno on this excursion. Both a blessing and a curse, to be the one beaten up, he thinks with a wry chuckle to himself.

“We really are sorry, Men of Craft and Blade,” says Thor sympathetically, standing just outside the Bifrost. There is genuine sorrow in his expression, but it’s an apology Phil has no desire to accept.

The world lights up in a rainbow tide of a million colors and a million stars and a million eyes. Thor and Asgard fade.

Phil stumbles.

He grasps his bandaged ribs with a hiss as the ache increases, doubling over as his aching body hits solid ground, Technoblade’s arm strong and steady and there to pull him back up. The floor is vaguely familiar, a marbled surface that shines in a familiar light, and—

“*Fuck*,” breathes Stark’s distinctive voice, and there’s a scattering of footsteps and chairs scooting outward. Phil’s vision is doubled when he looks up, sweat rolling down his brow and swimming in his eyelashes. Techno stumbles too, quickly dragging them both to a couch, and Phil gasps as he sits, finally able to curl up and sit protectively guarding his ribs. “Fucking Thor!”

“Quiet down, Stark,” says Natasha, as Phil drags his trembling hands — when had they started to shake so badly? — upward to cover his ears. He nods thankfully, nausea rising within him as too many voices and too many people surround him.

Peter, asking them if they’re ok. Bruce, looking them up and down for obvious wounds. Steve discusses Thor’s conduct quietly with Stark — but not quietly enough. Sam is in the

kitchen somewhere, his voice hushed and quick as he speaks to Vision, who is talking in turn to Wanda, and— and *Phil's head is going to split apart*—

“Get out.”

It goes completely silent. Every head snaps around to face Technoblade, thighs pressed against Phil's own, both his arms holding the avian up to his chest, pulling his hands gently from his ears and keeping him from digging his talons into his scalp. (*When had he started to do that?*)

“I asked you to *leave*,” Techno says again, a dangerous edge to his tone. “We just got kidnapped, and you all makin’ a bunch of loud noises the moment we get back is *not helping*.”

Natasha is the one to step up. Phil can hear her, even when he turns his head into Techno's chest, breathing fast and shallow, eyes wide open but only darting back and forth against the fabric of his friend's shirt. “We need to help treat your injuries. I understand that you're—”

“It's already been done.” Techno's hand rides up the back of Phil's shirt and exposes the bandages there. The claw quickly moves away and settles on top of his head, and he leans into the touch, trying desperately to ground himself, as Techno's shirt spins and spirals and sparks with white spots. He leans in a little closer as he realizes that the snake resting in Techno's sleeve has disappeared. There is no one there to watch his expression any longer. “Phil's the only one who really got hurt. Now all of you— *Get. Out.*”

All of them fall silent at the sight of the deep bruises painted across Phil's side. Suddenly, the way he's shaking apart must become clear to them, because no more words are exchanged. Phil pants shallowly, a low whine falling out as he curls up, hands gripping Techno's shoulders, everything falling apart around him.

The moment the Avengers are gone, Techno gives up his strength.

“Oh, Phil,” he mumbles, arms moving to pull the avian into his lap, struggling to get his hands around him properly with how much the man is shaking. Phil warbles out something that was once a word as he burrows into Techno's chest, still gasping for air, eyes so wide they burn. Suddenly, tears are flowing freely down his cheeks, spit trailing down his chin, his mouth unable to close around a wail that simply cannot form. So, he speaks instead.

“W— we din't even— we din't ask t' *be here*,” Phil slurs, rocking back and forth in Techno's lap, arms held tightly against his chest as he's crushed into his friend's lap, arms wrapped around him just enough to be comfortable, never hurting his ribs. “*We— we didn't 'ven... do an'thing...*”

Finally, the sob in his gut releases itself, and he chokes on it as it releases, a wail that flickers and dives down into the ground, Technoblade's heart tensing at the sound. Phil continues to mumble his beliefs — that it isn't their fault, that they didn't do anything, that they didn't ask to be here or be born and all they ever wanted was the End-Forsaken *moon*.

Techno is there throughout it all, Phil curled into a tight ball in his arms as the avian hiccups and sobs and warbles his anger and fear out into his friend's broad chest. Tears of his own trickle down Technoblade's face --because they'd come *so close* to never coming back today. The moment Phil had fallen into that empty void beneath them plays on repeat in his mind, and he holds his partner ever closer as if trying to make him even more real.

It feels as if all the trust they'd finally started to have has broken apart, fractured by an accusation that hadn't even been true. And it's *awful*, because *Gods*— his trust is rare and fleeting, and he knows that Phil's is just the same.

“Fff- *fuck, mate*, ” Phil spits out, stuttering around the word as he chokes. Techno is there to hold him above the water, though, as he always is. He moves one hand out from Phil's back and instead gently massages the junction between his neck and shoulder, coaxing his breaths into a more neat and comfortable form.

A warbling chirp that seems to be nothing but instinct falls from Phil's lips at the touch, and he collapses bonelessly against Techno's chest, unable to hold the tense and guarded position he's been sitting in.

It's this instinctual word that finally makes the voices in his head scream once again— begging for blood, for battle, for vengeance for both Technoblade and the man he calls friend. The same protectiveness in himself is being echoed back by his chat, and he counts himself so, so lucky that they too have grown immense care for Philza.

“I know,” is all that Techno can get out of his chest, a stuttered and unfinished sentence that he must choke out before it becomes a sob. The weakness of crying is not something he ever likes to take part in — but for Phil, he merely rests his cheek atop the avian's head and allows the tears to roll down his own face.

At least, for this single second, they are safe.

Chapter End Notes

:D

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

This chapter is literally only fluff guys/gen

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil's ribs heal as quickly as anticipated. Techno and he are treated far too kindly in the proceeding weeks, but neither of them is complaining as they're borderline pampered. Jarvis lets them do pretty much whatever they want, which leads to a ridiculous one-sided prank war in which Techno completely destroys Clint's living room and Phil stuffs up his vents, but the archer isn't allowed to retaliate under Tony's strict orders.

The trust that once lied between the Avengers and the two offworlders has been next to destroyed. There are no casual visits to the other floors or sporadic movie nights. No more shared dinners or random hellos or even friendly waves as the two make their way through the halls, never separate, never alone.

Their codependency makes sense, but it's no less worrying. No less *dangerous*. If Philza was willing to get himself killed in foreign territory just to *find* Technoblade, there's no telling what else might be done.

Things start to fall apart. Expressions become hostile rather than neutral. Thor has to be banned from entering the tower. So, when Tony Stark goes to Phil and Technoblade and asks if they want to go on a camping trip, the two instantly say no. When Peter approaches them and begs them to come a day later, though...

Well. *Peter* hadn't kidnapped them and broken Phil's ribs. He is also not a weird talking snake — which magically disappeared the moment the Bifrost landed, somehow. Peter has swindled his way into buying them well over a thousand dollars of both ice cream and dresses, so neither of them is really up for saying no to him.

The way his eyes light up when Phil and Techno agree is worth it anyways.

Despite the fact that the two of them have been camping in dangerous terrain for well over half of their lives, Peter still insists on taking them shopping for all the best supplies. When he asks Tony for his credit card, the man groans and says he's gonna need an adult chaperone this time if he wants to be allowed to buy *anything*.

That is how they find themselves accompanying Peter to a place called Bass Pro Shop with a man named Wade Wilson who apparently thinks he is married to Phil's wife.

Wade Wilson is a tall, lean man, though his build is still twisted with muscle. He's heavily scarred across seemingly every inch of his body, and he wears a sweatshirt that says *Daddy's*

Lil Girl on the front with sans serif font. He is bald, has bright white teeth that are always on display, and is also an absolute nuisance.

“So if I can’t have your wife, are you down for a little canoodlin’?”

Phil has the urge to growl at the man. Instead, because he’s currently wheeling his shopping cart into the Bass Pro Shop, he slams it into the man’s side and shoves him with a wicked laugh of vindication.

“Fuck— fuck, man, ok!” He replies, hopping backward and very nearly sending Peter to the ground. Or into a fishtank. Wade puts his hands up in placation, smiling that same stupid smile that seems to be melted onto his face. “I get it. You don’t fuck! My wife doesn’t either, but I think that rule is only for me—”

“*Wade.*”

Somehow, Peter is the one who gets the man to shut up. He pinches his lips together and zips his fingers across them, mouthing something along the lines of “*mouth shut.*”

Finally, with that ridiculousness cleared, Techno — who is currently in possession of the shopping list — is able to clear his throat and start steering Phil in the right direction.

“Ok. It says here we need... tents. Fancy tents. That’s all it says, who wrote this list—”

“I uh— didn’t get to finish it, sir,” says Peter sheepishly. He does point up to the elevator, though, gesturing for Phil to head over there. He does, leaning over the cart, running a little, unable to care about the weird looks he gets. Shopping carts are shiny and fast and hold lots of other shiny things. How could he *not* like them? “I was up all night trying to convince Aunt May to let me and my friends go.”

“Gods, kid,” Techno groans out, listening to the babble of his voices as they scream very mature curse words and a couple more *E E E E*’s than he thinks is necessary. He runs a hand down his face and starts thinking about all the supplies that were necessary for camping out when the empire was still new and the stronghold was far too dangerous to traverse. “You—”

“Oh! Oh, I agree!” interrupts Wade suddenly, holding a hand up and tapping his cheek as if in intense concentration. He drapes himself over a fake-pond fishtank and starts nodding, brow furrowed. “E! E e e e—”

A few things happen at once. Peter looks over with an utterly confused expression and asks Wilson “What are you talking about?” Phil and Techno share a bewildered, perhaps a little frightened look. Wade Wilson falls into the pond.

Once the self-proclaimed merc with a mouth has been tugged out of the pond and has received several towels from frightened-looking employees — all of who he refers to by name — Technoblade stands right in front of him, intimidating and tall, and plants his hands on his hips.

“Alright, hot stuff, you’re not Collusus, but you’ll do—”

A loud chuff. “You can hear them.”

For a long moment, Wade’s expression remains confused, his brow furrowed, his teeth worrying his bottom lip. All it takes is Technoblade waving a claw towards his head. The man jumps up, eyes *wide*, a toothy grin brimming across his face as he drops his towels and grips Technoblade by the shoulders.

“*Don’t let Crowza by the fishtanks!*” He shouts, reciting word for word exactly what chat is currently screaming in Techno’s head. Wade shakes the piglin hybrid’s shoulders back and forth, only to shriek as he receives a swat to the head by one of Phil’s wings. “Ow! Look, birdie, it’s not what I’m thinking, it’s what *they*—” he gestures upward to Techno’s head, same as the man just did to himself “—*Are saying.*”

The Bass Pro Shop is annoyingly noisy, filled with the multi-floored multi-billion-dollar complex that is white conservatives that adore rifles and teenagers who like to make fun of hunters. Or— who come to watch the fish. Babies shout and run around, slamming their oily fists into glass displays. People go back and forth between canoes and rifles and all sorts of gimmicks, annoying the poor distressed workers here, who seem to have a ban on allowing Wade into the store but are too afraid to enforce it.

Even so, for a single moment, you could hear a pin drop.

Techno surges forward, wonder rather than anger in his eyes, and grips Wade by the sides of his face, his grin stretching so wide his lips break.

“You can— you can *hear the chatter?*” He says with wild disbelief, his tail suddenly sweeping back and forth across the ground like an excited dog’s. Wade nods his head up and down vigorously, wonder shared in his eyes too, mouth a small *O* as he brings his hands up and covers Techno’s.

“*Bumper Dumper 24% off...?*” He says, and Techno goes *wild*.

He whoops and turns around, gesturing at Wade, top from bottom, as if presenting something to Phil. “He can— he can hear it too, holy shit, Phil— Phil, he can *hear chat*—”

Phil surges forward as he connects the dots, realizing the implications of this all, leaving Peter to stand beside the cart with a very confused expression. “Mate— mate, do crows sometimes talk to you?” He asks suddenly, eyes wide and feathers poofing up. He cocks his head and lets out a chirp as if to remind Wade what a crow is.

“Philza,” he replies breathlessly, “*Everything talks to me.*”

After Wade has proven himself with a few more examples, such as: “*E e e Blood for the Tent god, and slug themed sleeping bags half off and woah woah woah woah woah tiny spider spider boy spider boy*, which gets him a slug to the shoulder from Peter, they continue on shopping. Of course, Techno’s tail has not ceased its happy movement, and a giddy smile remains on his mouth as he dumps things into the cart.

Every few minutes Wade and Techno will both shout out a discounted price or a good deal that the Chat has fed them. It seems that Technoblade still has the best grasp on the voices — for when he realizes Wade can hear them too, they all go crazy and start shouting about The Blood God, not Deadpool. Even so, it *does* get funny to watch random passerbyes startle when two people, completely in sync, shout “*ManCan Personal Beer Keg! Buy one get one free!*”

Peter is the one to keep them mostly on track, in the end. Because he really does want May to let him and his friends go on the trip, he’s the one to tell Techno and Wade to shut it so he can find the things he needs. Because he *also* has ADHD, though, he almost immediately gets distracted the moment Phil shows him the area of the store which has gimmicky fidget toys.

“Ok— but what even *is* a— a *Squish Mochi*?” Asks Phil, who has just torn open a small collectible bag of very squishy and edible-looking animal toys.

Peter, who has enough restraint to not open mystery bags before purchasing them, groans. “Uh— they’re like, little cutesy decoration toys? Give it here, I’ll put it in the cart—”

“No,” Phil says hotly, pulling out one of the squishies that happens to be a pig. He pokes it with a talon. It squishes. It goes back up when he moves his talon away. Phil chirps in joy and jumps backward. “No— no, this is mine now.”

Techno suddenly rips open a pack of his own. Peter yelps, trying to stop him — but it’s too late, and the seal is broken. He rummages around in the plastic packaging, nose scrunched up as his claws get used to the odd, sticky feeling of the tiny animals. Finally, he pulls out a chicken, squishing it between two fingers.

“Squishy Philza,” says Technoblade, making the beak of his bird toy poke into the head of Phil’s pig toy. “It’s us,” he deadpans, but his eyes are bright and excited.

“It’s *us!*” Phil crows giddily, all worries forgotten as he starts repeatedly squishing the pig in his hands and making repetitive little “*bap bap bap*” sounds, which Technoblade immediately starts copying, his ears perking up with joy.

Peter ends up backing off, leaving them to open up packages without buying them, figuring he can charge Mr. Stark’s card later on. Who is he to interrupt the two, while they have actual *fun*?

Both of his friends have been so incredibly *guarded* recently. Not often leaving their rooms, avoiding all the Avengers — the only exception usually being Vision or Peter. He sees the way they cling to each other. He sees the mistrust and borderline fear in their eyes. He did not overlook Phil’s talons clutching a cane when the Bifrost dropped them off. Peter *sees*.

He’s a perceptive kid. Always has been. It’s something he prides himself on in his day-to-day life, but sometimes it *hurts*, when he notices that something is wrong and he can’t do anything at all to help fix it. But watching Technoblade and Phil’s eyes light up over something so simply as stupid little silicone toys...

Well. Peter isn’t hiding his smile at all when he helps them open the packages and find more.

“Ah! They have dick and boob versions of these!” Says Wade, and the spell is broken. (Though only slightly.)

Eventually, though, they have to go on and get the rest of the necessary camping supplies. Despite their occupation with the pig and chicken in their respective clutches, both Technoblade and Phil *know their stuff*. They point out the flaws in the camping gear Peter and Wade look at and find something better, usually for cheaper. They even manage to steer Wilson away from the canoes, which he keeps trying to crawl into and take home for... In his words: “Protection from nuclear fallout.” When Peter tells him a bathtub is the standard shield, Phil and Techno get confused, and he ends up having to explain nuclear war to them. When he uses the words *bombs*, Phil’s eyes brighten, his eyebrow furrow, and his hand disappears. It reappears a second later with a stick of dynamite within it.

And *that* is how people get kicked out of Bass Pro Shops, Peter thinks, as he shoes Phil’s hand down and hushes him. Wade falls into another fishtank pod as he laughs. When Technoblade reaches in and drags him out, he has a catfish under his shirt.

“I cannot see these jackets, sir,” says Peter to Wade as they go past the camo section.

“I think you’re full of shit, little man,” says Wade right back, pulling a coat off the rack and tugging it on. It’s more than two times his size. When he starts muttering about how many fish he can fit in the pockets, Techno tugs it off of him and puts it back on the rack.

Then, it’s Phil’s turn to criticize the merchandise. He cocks his head to the side, squinting blearily into the mazelike depths of camouflage clothes sitting around. His eyes dart back and forth between brands, and he gestures to them occasionally, scoffing, or letting out soft critiques under his breath.

“This shit looks borderline useless,” he says, tugging on the sleeve of a bright orange camo pair of socks.

Suddenly, as Peter whirls around, Wade finds himself tearing apart the cardboard packaging holding a similar pair of socks together — though these are bright pink, with sequins, and happen to match his sweatshirt.

Peter tries to convince himself it’s fine by saying they’re sticking it to capitalism and the man. He still cleans up the garbage Wade leaves around. At least Phil and Techno threw it away when they were done pillaging.

So, they decide they will not be getting camo. Or guns — but that’s mostly just because Wade scoffs at the shotguns there and pulls a gun out of his boxers to compare to the arsenal and Peter has to make him put it away before they get arrested. He thinks a little friendly shoplifting is morally grey enough, but he *really* doesn’t want to get Phil and Techno even more traumatized by getting them introduced to police.

After a while, their first cart gets so filled up that Peter has to go and get them another one. Technoblade starts doing the heavy pushing with the original one, seeing as he is the largest — and the tallest — so the only one able to see over the mountain of supplies in the cart. Phil obviously looks slightly miffed at being too short to push it around.

As a solution, the bird-man shimmies his way up Techno's back, scrambling for purchase on his shirt. He flaps his wings to steady his balance, and suddenly, he's perched on the man's shoulder, bopping his head up and down with a satisfied little "*Bwoosh*."

"Mmmm," says Wade in a tone that suggests that whatever he says will get him in trouble with someone. "I wish somebody would climb *me*."

This time, instead of exasperation on Phil's face, there's real anger there. Even Techno looks frustrated at the implications for their relationship. Peter gets it — platonicism is platonicism. Nothing more. So, he leans up to Phil when Wade isn't looking, and whispers this:

"He can't die, you know?"

That is how, a few seconds later, Wade Wilson ends up in a bear hug from behind when Phil hops off Techno's shoulder, picks the Merc up, and dunks him into their empty shopping cart. He shrieks in fear — and when he sees where Phil has begun to lead the cart, he starts begging.

Shoving a 200 pound and 6-foot hunk of muscle down the stairs in a shopping cart is a bit hard at first. Especially when that chunk of man tries to grip at the railing, sobbing for mercy as Phil plants his boots against the rungs of the shopping cart and *shoves it*.

Luckily for Wade, the cart doesn't flip over on the way down.

He bounces down the steps a few times, until the momentum *throws* him out of his vessel, a scream breaching his lips as he goes flying, a loud *thud* accompanying a *crack* as his arm breaks on the wooden steps. Sliding down further, Wade curses like he's about to die, and then immediately gets smacked in the head by the falling shopping cart.

That is how the mighty Deadpool ends up at the bottom of a Bass Pro Shop's stairs with a broken arm and trapped under a shopping cart.

About twenty minutes after quickly fleeing the scene, Peter finally spots the man. He's sitting in a pond, left arm limp at his side, the other wrapped around a catfish. He's talking to the catfish. Peter does not tell Techno and Phil that he has found Wade. In fact, he leaves Wade and his catfish and broken arm in peace. Best not to mess with that.

They're in the fishing and bait section when things actually go wrong, to Peter's utter devastation.

A young man, looking eager and fresh-faced as he lugs several brand new fishing poles on his shoulder, rushes up to their little group. Technoblade and Peter are both pushing shopping carts, leaving Phil to sit up on his partner's shoulders and point out the places they need to go to. That also means his wings are mantled slightly above his back, making them look even bigger than usual.

"Oh, you've got a good lotta disguise on yer' back, heh?" says the man, brown-haired and freckled with braces on crooked teeth. He can't be older than 18. "Pretty bird wings, but a lil' facetious, eh?"

Phil and Techno blink at the man. Peter readies himself to call Matt should they end up needing an attorney after this. He also prepares himself to punch the man. *No one* makes weird remarks about his friends. Especially not Phil and his wings, which he clearly takes immense amounts of pride in.

Peter looks up to Philza to see how he reacts, worrying his bottom lip until it split, eyes wide. But, for whatever reason, all he sees is a grin.

Phil tips his head back. His mouth stretches open far further than it should be able to. He *squawks*.

“That is my pet snake, sir,” says Technoblade with an extremely straight face, reaching up to gently pet Phil’s boot, as if that were a bird’s claw. Phil continues to let out high pitched, warbling caws — far more unrealistic than anything Peter knows the avian is capable of. The man who walked up to them takes a step back, eyes wide and uncertain and all of a sudden, frightened. “Ah, it’s ok. He doesn’t bite.”

“*Yes I do!*” Shouts Phil inbetween loud caws. He flaps his wings and starts hissing. Techno’s blank face cracks just a little as his eyes start to water. The man runs away, clearly moderately traumatized.

Technoblade bows over and starts *howling*.

Peter and Phil quickly join them, laughing so hard it makes their ribs hurt and Techno has to force Phil to sit on the ground so he doesn’t injure his still healing chest. Tears stream down Technoblade’s face as he coughs and sobs into his arm, slamming a fist into the ground as he laughs and laughs and *laughs*, unable to stop.

That is how Wade finds them. Collapsed in the fishing section, laughing so hard they’re attracting glares. He appears suddenly, with a toy catfish with the tags ripped off in his arms and a glare on his face.

“I just missed something totally funny and hip, didn’t I?” he says accusatorily. When he lifts his broken arm to point at them all, though, he moans and falls over beside them.

And *that*, finally, with all four of them blocking the aisles, is how they get escorted out of the Bass Pro Shops.

Peter has to call Mr. Stark and inform him of the situation so that they can be let back into the store to buy their stuff. When asked why they were kicked out of the store, Peter just says *Wade*. Tony tells him that Wade Wilson is not an adult and therefore cannot be Peter’s adult chaperone. Wade chimes in and reminds Stark that he is in his thirties. Stark says that only proves his point. He then says that Wade is also a man-child and should not be allowed to drink alcohol or have a state ID.

He does, though, get their group back into the shop. (Small mercies. Peter thought Techno and Phil might have mental breakdowns at the loss of the squishy toys they’d basically stolen.)

After an hour of combing through everything they'd bought and ringing it up, the total comes out to a number Peter chooses to ignore as he scans Mr. Stark's credit card. *Finally*, their shopping trip is done.

They end up taking a large truck back home. Wade claims it's his, but honestly, Peter has no clue. It doesn't really matter — at least it fits all the tents. He climbs into shotgun beside the man while Phil and Techno curl up in the back, chatting quietly between themselves.

The drive is a rather long one. Wade is quiet for most of it, occasionally speaking to Peter about nothing and anything at all. He hums along to his music, much more subdued than he had been earlier. That's what Peter likes about his friend. Deadpool is an insane idiot who doesn't know how to take care of himself. Wade Wilson is exactly the same thing — but he's endearing. He's *kind*. And, best of all, he's protective, and Peter can respect that in anyone.

After a while the conversation in the back goes silent. Wade taps on the wheel as he looks back, before he turns to Peter and murmurs, eyes glinting with glee:

"They're *asleep*."

He looks back as well to confirm and finds that he has been pretty much blessed. Phil has curled up in Techno's lap, his wings cocooning around them both as he snores into the man's chest. Techno himself has his head slumped back and his legs shielding Phil as he sits in his lap. They're a tangled mess of limbs and soft breathing, eyes shut, faces entirely relaxed.

They look so... *young*.

Peter knows that his friends are adults. Are warriors and fighters and kings and emperors. Even so, as he watches the soft rise and fall of their chests, the fragile expressions on their faces, they look so utterly *young*. Something fiercely protective rears its head in his chest, and not for the first time.

When he turns back around, Wade is smiling genuinely. Peter raises a dubious eyebrow at the expression, but the elder man just presses his finger to his lips and shakes his head.

"*I think I like them*," he murmurs quietly, just as Peter has stopped caring about what Wade is smiling about. The teenager's head whips around, expression full of disbelief. When he sees the sincerity on his friend's face, though, he smiles. "*They're cute and fluffy. Like ducks with knives*."

Choking down his laughter so that Phil and Technoblade don't wake up is a struggle that Peter barely wins.

If y'all wanna see what the little toys Phil and Techno got, head to [my twitter](#)
hehee,,, and while you're at it perhaps maybe drop a follow??/nf

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

As promised to the 1000 something people who voted on my twitter poll (holy fucking shit) this chapter is more fluff! god, y'all!! i am on a roll this is insane

Strictly speaking, the Avengers have never actually had an “annual camping trip.” But their newest adoptions clearly need a break from... *everything*, and so for their benefit, said camping excursion exists *now*. For the first time.

Clint's beatup old pickup truck holds Natasha, Peter, Ned, and MJ. Natasha to keep Clint on track, and the children to make sure he doesn't die of boredom. Or of being strangled by Natasha, but she hasn't tried anything for a while, so who is there to assume she'll even go for his neck?

Unfortunately, Wade Wilson has been forced to come along. As the chaperone to Peter's shopping trip, he volunteered himself. That means that Matt Murdock — who is not any less terrifying — is coming along as Wade's adult supervision. His probably-stolen truck fits Murdock, Sam — who isn't blind, so can make sure Wade is actually driving to the right place — and Steve, who is there to stop Sam or Murdock from attempting to bludgeon Wade to death.

Wanda... Knows how to drive, allegedly. So she has her own van, fitting her, Vision, and Phil and Technoblade, who both seem quite comfortable to sit in the back of the ridiculously large car. Tony is with them as well (but mostly only to make sure that Wanda really can drive, because Vision sure as hell can't. They've tried.)

Bruce doesn't do camping anymore. Thor is back at the tower to keep down the fort, though some of that decision is only made because Tony is not letting Thor anywhere near Philza or Technoblade until they're ready for that. He's still pissed as hell at the Asgardian. Who just wipes random people off the face of the earth on a whim?

So they all pile into their respective cars and set off, far too many camping supplies in each of their trunks. Plus two stowaways: A weird, squishy chicken and pig duo which mysteriously find themselves sitting on Wanda's dashboard.

“Alright, kids,” says Tony, smacking the back of his seat and turning around the face the offworlders, who just send him a weary, unamused glance. “You two ready to brave the wilderness?”

“I'm going to wrestle a bear,” is what Techno says. Tony decides he's not going to argue.

The familiar tones of Fiona Apple filter up quietly from the speakers in the car. A song Tony has never heard save for when he ventures onto Wanda and Vision's floor and catches a glimpse of the two waltzing to whatever music they've got on. It's something dark and upbeat— Paper Bag, reads the screen up above, which quickly displays that Wanda has begun to turn the music up.

"It's time we started to culture you too, hm?" She says as she slowly maneuvers through crowded New York streets, tapping her hands against the steering wheel. Thankfully, she doesn't try to look back and take her eyes off the wheel. "Enough of whatever Parker plays for you."

Tony turns to see Phil with his nose to a speak, scratching at it as if he's about to pry it apart. "Ah—" the avian sits back up like a child with their hands getting caught in a cookie jar. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Phil. You're gonna make Wanda's car explode, and insurance doesn't cover *that*."

"He's *exaggerating*," Vision sighs, sending his creator a glare even as Tony just laughs. "Insurance *does* cover that. At least Mr. Stark's plan does. Although— attempting to disassemble the speakers will not explode the car. It *will* likely make Wanda sad."

"Damn right," she quips up ahead.

Philza seems to consider this for a second. Beside him, Technoblade just holds back a very obvious smile.

"I'm going to dismantle *Stark*, then," he says abruptly. Stark, who does not want to die at the inexperienced surgical hands of Philza Craft, someone who has only lived in this world for around a month, yelps.

The car ride goes surprisingly smoothly. Technoblade and Phil spend most of the time glued to the windows, watching the buildings and vehicles of New York pass by. Once they've all made it out of the city and onto the freeways, it's all a little bit smoother.

The high speeds clearly are a bit of an attraction to Technoblade, because while Phil merely watches him, giggling, the other man opens a window and sticks his head out, tail thumping into the seat behind him. It's only when an abandoned newspaper page almost flies into his face that Wanda politely asks him to roll the window up.

"There's so much *trash here*," he says as he mournfully props his chin up against his knees, something ridiculously like a pout spread across his lips. Tony is sure if he pointed it out, though, he'd get eviscerated by said teeth. "At least back home people just burnt it all."

"Burning trash burns the atmosphere, kiddo." Tony flips through his phone, one foot lazily plopped down onto the seat in front of him.

He can *hear*, rather than *see*, the frown on Techno's face. "Uh, no. Burning trash burns trash."

"What's an atmosphere?" Asks Phil, off to the side.

“Oh yeah.” Techno snorts. “Yeah, what’s an atmosphere?”

They’re already at the first rest stop by the time Tony has finished explaining to them what the atmosphere, equators, and ozone layer are. It seems most of the information went in through one ear and then into the other’s, like some warped game of telephone. If Phil nods in understanding, Technoblade misinterprets some huge detail. Same thing vice versa.

Eventually, Vision takes over for Tony and starts reciting facts like the insufferable metal dictionary he is. This, apparently, is *easier* for the offworlders to grasp, which only adds to Tony’s (admittedly fake) agitation. Or, maybe they’re just pretending they understand to get on his nerves.

But yes. Finally, they make it to their first stop. A Kum-and-Go (which Phil looks absolutely disgusted by the name of) off some random exit in the middle of nowhere. It seems that Wilson’s group is the only other group that has arrived yet, because Tony can immediately spot the asshole siphoning gas into a can while Murdock, Sam and Steve wander about.

As soon as they all unload from the car, Wanda lets out a sharp, slightly horrified gasp. When Tony turns — disaster has struck.

The chicken and pig have melted onto the dashboard of Wanda’s car, leaving them puddles of mushy silicone that have begun to drip down the side. The offworlders catch the sight, and—

“*Fuck*,” Phil swears angrily, wings puffing up on his back. Technoblade groans in irritation. “No! We fucking died!”

“We *melted*,” corrects the taller man dryly, smacking a hand flippantly against the hood of the car. They don’t seem seriously distraught or anything, but...

Well. When they make it inside the store, Tony starts looking around.

Murdock, who looks incredibly disgusted by all the foods in the convenience store, remains outside with Wanda. Vision is in charge with getting anything they might need that isn’t food. Tony hands Philza and Technoblade each forty bucks and tells them to go ham, hoping to distract them as he purchases the entire stock of those stupid squish-mochis from that stupid Kum and Go.

He meets them in the middle of the store, carrying several bags — mostly filled with the stupid toys. Philza is carrying several bags of assorted sunflower seeds along with about five Arizona Iced Tea, which he is *very* close to dropping. Technoblade has a bit more of a well-rounded selection. A pack of jerky, a couple bottles of water, *way* too much candy, and... A single-serving container of Raisin Bran.

“You— out of *all* the cereals they’ve got here?” Tony asks incredulously as he approaches them, pointing to the bowl with one purpling hand, the bags on his arms cutting off his circulation entirely. “Ok, grandpa, how much are they paying you?”

“*You’re* payin’ me, Stark,” replies Technoblade matter of factly, which is, to be fair, true. He holds his Raisin Bran protectively to his chest and glares. “I happen to *like* this stuff. *It’s*

good.”

“Mgnnng...” Tony looks over at Phil, who is sneering at the cereal selection, curling inward and away from it like a cat near a puddle. “Eugh. *Raisins.*”

“You’re a *bird!*” Techno cries abruptly. Tony starts to get a feeling this is an ongoing argument. “You eat seeds and nuts! How do you *not* like *raisins*, Philza, man?”

“Because they’re like tiny rabbit shits, you dumbass!”

“They’re like *what?*”

“Tiny rabbit shits!” Repeats the avian, his wings mantling higher and higher. Suddenly, he drops several cans of iced tea. It startles him so badly his shrieks, which only makes Techno laugh, which makes *him* drop *his* water bottles. Tony is forced to drop his own bags to help them clean up.

By the time they’ve finished cleaning up and purchasing all their food, Clint’s truck has arrived, and Ned, MJ, and Peter are absolutely *hyped* up on caffeine from an unknown origin. Natasha herds her cats past Tony with a roll of the eyes and a soft “*Kids,*” though her eyes are filled with mirth.

Wanda climbs into the car first. Tony is second — mostly because he wants to be the one to leave ridiculous amounts of those squishy bags in the back seat. Then, Vision. Techno and Phil are the last to board, as Wanda starts the car and *Adele* starts playing, and look quite miffed about all the plastic bags in their seats.

That is, until they open them.

“Holy fuckin’ *shit, mate!*” Phil exclaims loudly, thick talons clawing through the plastic bag and it’s precious cargo. Tony is completely unable to stifle a laugh as the two in the backseat go absolutely nuts for a shit ton of squishy mystery toys meant for ten year olds.

“Oh. It’s *floppy.*” Technoblade had plucked up a cat stretched out on its belly, pinching it between two fingers and watching as it jiggles back and forth with the movement of his hand. In the two’s distraction, though, they’ve forgotten to get buckled into the car. Wanda makes a particularly hard turn and they lurch out of their seats.

After that, Vision lectures the two on safety in modern vehicles while Technoblade grumbles that he likes planes more than cars anyways. After *that* sideways interaction has been completed and someone named *Mitski* has begun to play through the car speakers, the two become increasingly more absorbed in looking through their packs of squish-majigs or whatever they’re called.

Tony starts to realize he might’ve gone a little overkill with how many he bought, though, as Phil and Technoblade start passing out extras. He himself is gifted a small elephant, a shark, and a starfish — all of which he secretly has decided he will keep forever, thank you very much. Wanda gets two pawprints, a grey cat that she calls *meow*y , and a lamb with creepily

big black eyes. Vision looks like he's going to rupture something with how excited he is to receive his own. A soft pink bunny rabbit, a purple cat, a panda, and a floppy little seal.

The rest of the ride is just rinse and repeat. Stop at another gas station or rest stop. Buy whatever snacks they need (which is a lot, because apparently Phil and Technoblade both have that irritating metabolism that comes with being a little bit better in every way than a regular human being.)

Their final stop is a completely out of the way rest stop with only one or two freight trucks parked within it, the workers all old and bearded and tired. Phil does not join them outside, his eyes trained on the sky above, the silken ebony of his feathers ruffling with every gust of wind.

Technoblade observes him for a few second when their group leaves the convenience store, red eyes scanning Phil as he scans the clouds. "It looks like a nice day for a flight, huh?"

Wings twitch, ruffle, and shudder on Phil's back. He rolls his shoulders, eyes never straying from their goal. "Hey Vision?"

"Hm?"

"What're the coordinates to the campsite?"

"Well—" A sigh. Vision rattles the string of numbers out, and Tony watches with an irritated frown as Phil uses his seemingly magical abilities to pull what he calls a communicator out of what he calls his inventory. He scans it for a moment, one of his boots scraping across the ground, back and forth, like a bird about to take flight.

And he *is*.

"I'll meet you guys at the campsite," he says, as he steps forward and grins behind his shoulder. Suddenly his wings *snap* open, massive span catching the air and sweeping through it several times. The air has Tony planting his feet in the ground, wary of its strength, slightly amazed. *Shit*— if Philza ever trusts him enough, he'd love to study how his wings work.

Then, with a crow of laughter and legs that are suddenly running, wings that are suddenly flapping, Philza Craft *flies*.

It's nothing like the iron man suits. His wings seem to catch the air like water between fingers, trickles of it drifting away as they slip through the bottom of his feathers. There's a screaming whistle as the air catches him, and as suddenly, he's turning, careening to the side, nearly falling — until he isn't, and he's gliding high above them, edges of his form outlined by the sun above, circling them like a vulture.

And then he's off faster than anything, a wicked sound like the crowing of a morning rooster shooting through the air, his speed unmatched.

—

By the time everybody finally arrives at the campsite, its all but assembled. There are several tents — most of which occupy 2-3 people — along a campfire, already billowing with flames as Philza teaches MJ, Ned, Peter, and Deadpool how to start one. They end up almost setting several folding chairs on fire before the avian steers them in the right direction, until the air begins to smell not of molten plastic but of firewood, ash, and oak.

Dusk has begun to creep across the horizon. Hues of pink and orange and blue, stars just barely starting to spot the ceiling of the sky. The winter sun is bright and explosive as it dips below the trees, the moon growing progressively brighter as if an eye to watch them settle.

Unsurprisingly, everyone sort of lets the offworlders do their own thing. They seem almost giddy to be out in the wilderness again, pitching most of the tents and arranging lighting around the whole base. They talk of something called “mobs,” and the odd fact that they don’t exist in this universe. They seem thankful, though, because Phil’s wings bristle at every mention of them, and Techno’s ears go flat to his skull.

They pack all their food up into bags and hang them from trees despite assurances no bears will be around in the night. Every sleeping bag has fabric rolled into the bottom for insulation for their feet, despite the fact that said sleeping bags are made specifically so that is unnecessary. Phil mother-hens all of the minors of the group into hats despite the fact that all of them are wearing hoodies already.

“Thank you, Wilson,” grumbles Matt as he’s led to the campfire, his cane much harder to use with the covering of leaves on the ground. Despite the fact that he doesn’t need it, it’s much easier to be led than to constantly put in effort. And— his identity should stay firmly in place, no thank you.

“Huh?” says Sam in response, blinking owlshly up from his hand of cards, which Clint very unsubtly starts to stare at. He’s losing anyways.

Natasha, on the other side of the card game, purses her lips against a laugh. “Not that Wilson, Wilson. The—”

“Hunkier one!” Provides said Wilson unhelpfully as he too sits down next to Matt. Beside him is Phil, then Technoblade, both of them poking at the fire with long sticks. He claps a hand against Murdock’s back, and it’s clear the other man hardly tolerates it. “With my hunky man thing.”

“I am not a man thing. I also am not into you.”

“You could be though!”

“My sexuality means I have no gender preference. It doesn’t mean I have no *taste*. ”

Wade clutches his heart dramatically, gasping loudly as he completely falls off the log he’s sitting on. Suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, he procures a marshmallow and sticks it in the flames, hand and all. He curls his knees beneath himself and hums sadly as he watches the flesh twist and turn.

“And I thought we had something, devil man,” he sighs wistfully, earning him a fierce glare from Matt that *almost* lands on the back of his head. Deadpool, who has absolutely no concept of decency, refuses to shut his mouth. “Almost got it, hottie. Maybe next time you’ll catch my eyes instead of their general vicinity.”

That earns him a kick in the back from Phil, who earns in turn a smarmy grin from Matt.

“Philza, stop abusing Wilson, it doesn’t go anywhere,” says Clint as he continues to cheat at his card game. “Believe me. We’ve all tried.”

Sam, who continues to forget that he is not the only owner of his last name, looks up again. “What?”

The evening progresses in much the same way. *Lightly*. It’s a nice change from all of the constant worry and fear that all of them — but especially Technoblade and Phil — have been forced to endure recently.

Phil goes on an evening flight, though he returns quickly, carrying a handful of pretty stones that he found in a lake nearby and says he plans to show Peter and his friends the next day. Techno lazily cleans the man’s feathers as he speaks quickly, enraptured by the crystalline pebbles he’d found. Phil doesn’t seem to notice, but a chirp or two slips out of him every time Techno cleans a particularly large leaf or stick out of his feathers.

After that, all the Avengers gather together at the fire, Tony passing out large metal sticks and delegating a single marshmallow between everyone. This rule quickly comes in handy, when Peter attempts to make a three-tiered s’more with about six marshmallows.

Then they all realize that Phil and Technoblade have never made s’mores.

“What’s a— a *simore*?” says Phil, wrinkling his nose at the puffy white marshmallow currently sitting in his claws. He stabs it with a single finger, growing increasingly more distressed looking as it sticks to him.

Everyone seems to pause, immediately looking over at the two and realizing how utterly helpless they both look.

“You’ve... Never had a s’more?” says Steve carefully, still twisting his own marshmallow around and glancing at it to keep it from burning. His forehead is creased — not with disbelief, but some sort of fond sadness.

Phil shakes his head and turns to Techno, who does in turn, trying to pick marshmallows out of his hair where Peter had stuck some spitefully. “Uh— we usually just eat assorted meat products when there’s a campfire around.” Then: he grimaces. “Or rotten flesh, if things are bad.”

“You eat fucking *what now*?” Wade says sharply, speaking the loudest as the entire group of people say similarly horrified things.

A pause as Techno and Phil blink owlishly, clearly confused by the shock. "...Rotten flesh, mate. Sometimes you have to eat what you've got. At least it's filling enough to get you through the night."

"Where the hell are you getting rotted flesh?" asks Steve, looking so taken aback he forgets his own dislike for swearing.

"Who *are these people?*" blurts a new voice. Everyone turns to MJ to see her looking up from her book, squinting narrowly at the offworlders. "I mean— why are they here again? Isn't this supposed to be some sort of Avengers thing?"

There's no judgement in her voice. Only curiosity, as she continues to scribble in her sketchbook every few seconds, gaze trained on Phil and Techno every time she looks up. At this question, though, there seems to be a pause in all conversation.

Why *are* Philza and Technoblade as close to everyone as they are already? How have they seemingly made allies with everyone in the Avengers and half of their own friends and allies as well? Even the two in question look slightly put off by the inquiry, freezing in their spots and looking at each other for guidance.

Though the rest of the group turns to the de facto leader of the Avengers for an answer, it isn't Steve who gives them one.

Vision is the one who leans forward, arms tucked against his knees as he stares across the fire, piercing eyes going straight into Technoblade and Phil, as if searching for something, intrusive and sharp.

"I believe it's because, in a way, they *are* Avengers," he says in that same solid voice and tone he always holds. He gestures across the fire, smiling warmly at the two. "You don't need to *fight* to be included with us. Wanda and I make that quite clear. We almost never are included in direct battle."

The unspoken goes unsaid. In some odd way, the Avengers are family. In some odd way, Technoblade and Phil have been adopted into it as well.

"Well." After another pause, the information sinking in, Steve stands and rounds the fire, orange casting shadows across his face as he goes and sits next to Techno and Phil. "Alright, you've got the first step wrong. Stab the marshmallows with the stick, ok?"

"I feel like that'll ruin it, but ok then," Techno mutters.

Phil says something much the same, but with a bit more cursing as marshmallow fluff continues to stick to his hands. In the end, though, he does skewer the thing with a crow of triumph and a laugh. "Ha! Ok! Now I know how to make s'mores."

"Not quite." Steve guides his own skewer into the fire, turning it every so often, watching as the outside starts to brown. "Do this, ok? Keep it rolling, otherwise it'll burn."

“I happen to *like* them when they get burnt,” says Tony, but it sounds like he’s only saying it for the sake of an argument.

“You *are* burnt,” says Clint accusatorily and slightly nonsensically. He grumbles something to Natasha. Apparently, being outed as a cheater in cards and then chewed out by Sam is not a fun experience.

“I don’t know what that means so I’m choosing not to take offense to it.”

“All of you shut the fuck up! I’m trying to learn how to s’more!” Phil says as a sudden interruption, yanking his marshmallow out of the fire and waving it around like a sword. He yelps and replaces it back in the flame, though, when he realizes it’s on fire by itself. “Uh— Steve, is it supposed to do that?”

“Blow it out,” he instructs as he pulls his skewer out and demonstrates, putting out the fire growing around his own.

Phil obeys. Technoblade, who seems increasingly enraptured by the fire before them, continues to turn his back and forth until the skin is bubbling and black, his hands a shade of red and orange with the color of the flames reflected by his claws.

Finally, though, when Phil gently tucks his wing around the man, Techno snaps out of it and chuffs, pulling his marshmallow out. His face drops, though, when he sees its charred surface.

“Aw man,” he deadpans, “I burnt it.”

“The burnt ones are the best ones Mr. Blade,” says Ned as he pulls his own back, eating the skin off his marshmallow and then giving the mushy insides to Peter, who bites it off his hand with a triumphant grin while MJ watches in slight disgust. “It makes it crunchy!”

“Marshmallows are supposed to be soft. And melted,” Wade adds beside them, wrinkling his nose at Technoblade’s.

“Marshmallows are vile concoctions of sin and decadence,” says Matt, who sounds like he has experience. He grins, though, and tosses a chunk of ridiculously expensive looking chocolate from his bag into his mouth, landing it perfectly between sharklike white teeth.

“Yeah, well you’re a lawyer so you don’t get an opinion.” That one earns Wade another kick — this time from Murdock himself.

The rest of the group continues to argue about what state makes a marshmallow best. Vision says he rather likes the ones that are puffy like sheep. Wanda tells him she’s breaking up with him if he doesn’t like burnt ones. He tells her he can’t eat anyways. She says she’s sparing him. It goes on and on like that, but everyone else gets into the drama as well — save for Steve, Techno, and Phil.

“Now you slide it off the skewer and onto the chocolate— yes, yes, good job,” he mutters as he watches Phil try it first, one hand under the man’s s’more as if guiding a kid holding a cup

of water, liquid about to splash over the sides. “Now you,” Steve says as he turns to Techno, handing him some graham crackers and chocolate.

“That’s a lot easier than most fire based activities,” Techno says with a short chuckle, thumbing the chocolate between the graham crackers and his marshmallow. “Or like, fire aspect.”

Philza groans off to the side. His wings flutter lightly on his back, head tipped back with the edge of a giggle on his lips. “Oh, fire aspect is awful, mate.” Before Steve can ask what that is, Phil takes his s'more in both hands and takes a massive bite out of it.

His lips come away with chocolate all over them. His cheeks go red and he wipes it away furiously with his forearm, chewing carefully and thoughtfully. Then, he grins.

“Oh, shit! This is actually really fuckin’ good! Go on, Tech, try it—” he lightly slugs the other man’s shoulder before going right back to his earlier topic. “Yeah, fire protection is pretty useful but fire aspect is *shit*.”

Technoblade takes a slightly daintier bite of his own s'more, and his ears perk up, his red eyes gone wide. “Yoo! This isn’t bad!”

“Told you they’re good burnt, Mr. Blade!” Ned says from across the campfire, now sitting on the floor of leaves beneath him and tracing designs in the dirt with one finger. MJ smacks him lightly on the back of his head. “Ow! What was that for?”

“Stop trying to sway the magical fantasy-RPG themed newcomer’s opinions on s'mores,” she says, before she groans, slowly standing from her log and slipping her hand away from where it just sat in Peter’s. She makes her way around the rest of the chatting Avengers, going to join Steve where he sits on the ground. She stands there, hugging her sketchbook to her chest, and regards Phil and Techno with a blank expression.

“Uh. What’s your name again?” Phil asks, blinking.

“MJ,” she replies plainly, with a nod, her expression staying just as deadpan as always. Just as deadpan as *Technoblade*. Phil grins. “I drew you two.”

That’s clearly not what Phil and Techno were expecting, whatever it is that they did expect. Technoblade, mouth full of s'more, looks up with a confused frown. Phil’s wings ruffle in curiosity, his hands digging into the wood beneath him as he looks up and leans forward.

MJ doesn’t speak as she pulls her book back out from against her chest, licking her thumb and paging through the parchment, backlit by the orange flames. She lowers herself to her knees to give them a better view, and then she turns the pages.

The first one is of Technoblade. It’s a detailed sketch. His eyes are deep, almost black, in the night lighting, little stars of white against his pupils. His nose is just barely wrinkled as he stares off at some unknown disturbance, his teeth bared in a half-grin, his tusks perfectly replicated from height to chips. His long pink hair is tucked behind his ears, braided down his

back and highlighting the emerald hanging from his ear. His most human features are accentuated, his ears and tusks merely the details to add to the expression.

On the other page sits Phil. He's perched atop a log, his wings half extended as if he's about to take flight. Each feather seems to be perfectly illustrated, from each crooked vane to every soft diamond shaped flight feather at the ends. His face is lit with joy. Where Technoblade's portrait attempted to show off his more human traits, Phil's does not. His teeth are pointed and his eyes are sharp, far sharper than any humans. The freckles on his face seem to glow, despite only being pinpricked by graphite. The feathers on his jaw and cheekbones seem to be caught in an invisible wind, and his hands, stretched out beside his wings, are long and twisted.

They're *beautiful*.

What must be several minutes go by as Techno and Phil sit in admiring silence, the avian cooing every few seconds as he notices and traces every new detail. Technoblade is silent, tipping his head back and forth as he regards the picture, but his eyes are bright with wonder and admiration.

"These are..."

"These are incredible," finishes Phil when Technoblade trails off, still captivated, one hand reverently tracing the edge of his partner's jaw in the photo. When he finally leans back, he looks like a crow caught in a jewelry store, blue eyes bright and silvery.

"Thank you," MJ says, sending the two of them a warm smile. She gives a little joking half curtsy before she turns the book around and suddenly rips the papers out, handing each one to their respective owners. "Have them. I just thought you two looked cool."

Both of the duo thank her in unison, clearly stunned to have received the gifts at all. Soon, everyone else is clambering for a view. There's only high praise to be given, of course, even as Wade plays it up a little and Matt makes a joke about loving the color of Phil's eyes. Steve seems particularly impressed, but that's because he understands. He knows how much an artist pours into even the smallest of sketches, and he looks up at MJ with a knowing nod.

"They're amazing. Have you ever considered art as a career?"

"I prefer not to consider working at all," she quips back, going and sitting back down with Peter and Ned, who high-five her solidly at the attention she's garnered. Ever her typically dry facade has been wiped away by a bit of a stunned smile at *Captain America* complimenting her art. "But yes. I have."

"Well keep fuckin' thinking about it," says Phil with a grin, still clutching her paper in a death grip. Steve doesn't even have the heart to chastise his language — he agrees.

—

After so much unpacking and moving during the day, the entire group turns in early. Each tent has its designated owners — and even though some of the adults linger— eventually, all

are filled except for one, leaving Techno and Phil to observe the fire as it dies.

With the rest of the clearing vacated, they've lost their guarded fronts. Phil has his wings wrapped around them both, his head tipped against Technoblade's shoulder as the hybrid gently massages one of his hands, humming a quiet lullaby that hasn't been sung in centuries.

"The stars here are different," says Phil in a quiet, slightly muffled voice, cheek pressed up against Techno's broad shoulders. The other man looks up, nodding in agreement.

They are different. Different in a thousand, trillion unimaginable ways, thousands of lightyears dead and still inextricably changed in a completely different way. Techno can point out several constellations that he *knows* are wrong. Now that they're in the dark of the wilderness once again, they can see.

Techno's head falls against Phil's head, cheek gently nuzzling into his crown as the smaller man lets out a soft, fond chuckle and reaches up to scratch behind Technoblade's ear. Behind him, the man's tail sweeps back and forth, hitting against Phil's wings in a familiar rhythm.

"They're not bad, though," Techno mutters back, continuing the work the knots out of Phil's hands. His talons, made for creation and building and for crafting together all sorts of unimaginable beauties, are thin and knotted and have an ever-present shake, but they still do exactly as they were built for. Lifting the hand up, Techno lightly brushes his lips to his knuckles, a bit of a laugh falling from his lips.

"Sap," Phil says right back, chuckling. But once Techno lets his hand go, he runs them through the other man's hair and gently breaks through the tangles. "I guess you're right, though. They aren't bad stars."

The two of them sit there for a long time, staring up at the stars and the occasional cloud passing across them. The fire has burnt down to blackened ash and soft embers, an orange glow that twists and turns across the two's faces like many fingered shadows. There's a sense of safety shared between them in the knowledge that here, in this odd, dangerous world, they can spend the night in darkness, and nothing at all will be there at their door.

Eventually, though, the cold starts to get too much. The unspoken agreement that Phil doesn't want to wake up with sore knees and Techno doesn't want to somehow manage to slip into hibernation goes unspoken, but they both stand up and lead each other to their tent with quiet, fond teasing whispers.

Their sleeping bags are much warmer than anything they would've had back in their newborn empire. There's an electrical lantern hanging from the top of the tent, swaying back and forth whenever one of them accidentally jostles the walls. Phil's wings spill out of his sleeping back and he slips onto his stomach, draping the great black appendages over Technoblade as a form of extra warmth.

In return, the half-piglin wraps his tail around Phil's waist, an almost unconscious decision that he makes just as they both start to fall asleep. And together, wrapped in darkness and safety, they sleep.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Holy shit this fic is almost at 2000 kudos-- i'm-- holy SHIT????

OK REAL QUICK THOUGH: there's a brief mention of suicide in this chapter! It's brought up in a joking manner (Deadpool my beloved) but just watch out for that

It's a three day camping trip. The first day — which is really only the few hours snagged before sunset — is calm and happy and warm, fluffy in some ridiculous way that has everyone rising with a smile on their faces, whether it be secretive or not.

Matt and Natasha are the first to awaken. Phil peeks his head out of his tent to see them quietly speaking, clearly not holding back from discussions about secret identities and who Matt truly is. He does duck his head back into privacy, though, thinking it better to stay until Technoblade wakes up.

It's about a half hour when the amount of chatter outside has awoken his friend. Techno's ear flicks, and he groans, shuffling closer to Phil, hiding his head in the man's wings as if feathers will help hide all the noise. Phil chuckles fondly, shifting the drapery so that Techno can no longer hide, gently scratching the space behind his ears and coaxing him awake.

"It's morning, sleepy pig. Cmon. Get up. We've got breakfast out there, I bet you can smell it," he says teasingly, pressing a thumb to Techno's nose and shoving it upward until it looks like a bit of an actual pig snout.

The man in question sneezes, shoving Phil away with a none-too-gentle hand. He rouses anyways, though, slouching and grumbling grumpily, blearily looking round for his cloak — which Phil has burrowed into completely. "You're a ridiculous menace. Give me my things."

"I'm *cold*."

A rustle. Techno digs a claw into the cloak and *yanks*, sending the much smaller man thudding against the ground with a noisy squawk. He sits there, whining petulantly as Techno throws his cloak on, before tossing Phil's own across his shoulders for good measure.

"Sucks to suck, old man," he says gruffly, before vacating the tent entirely, leaving Phil a puddle of shivering, chuckling feathers.

The avian does eventually join the rest of the group, snatching his own cloak off Techno's broad shoulders and sitting next to him, still shivering a little in the brisk dawn air. The breakfast the others have prepared is hearty and fulfilling, nothing like the garbage of rations they're typically used to. It's then that Clint decides to open his fat mouth once again.

“Hey— didn’t you two talk about eating rotten flesh last night?” He looks around the circle, collecting nods to confirm. “Yeah— yeah, what the hell was that about?”

Phil, who spent about 5 years in total isolation and has had his fair share of starvation scares, chuckles dryly into his cup of instant oatmeal. “Ah, yeah. That’s a rough one. Sometimes if we’re out too long and get caught in the snow, we run out of food, you know? And if we’re way up in the middle of fucking nowhere in the mountains, there isn’t much prey around.” He shrugs. “Sure, Techno an’ I could go hunt around, but that could take *days*. ”

“So we just use the mobs that happen to be walkin’ around,” Techno continues, chewing on his own breakfast sandwich, egg popping out the side of the bun. “Can’t use skeletons for obvious reasons. Spiders are poisonous. Creepers...” a wry chuckle as he mimics an explosion, hand flexing in a mushroom cloud sort of gesture. “So we go after the zombies, when we—”

“Wait wait wait— *zombies*?” Peter blurts, leaning forward, abandoning *his* food entirely. “You— what? *Zombies*?”

“Yeah?” Techno replies, raising an eyebrow. “Big ole nasty green guys? Like to groan until you put a sword through their heart?”

Phil laughs loudly. “Ah! Don’t forget the babies—”

“Phil, oh my god, I literally *cannot forget baby zombies*—”

“I mean, I’d hope not, seeing as I got fuckin’ *murdered* because of one of them,” Phil interrupts with a brush of his elbow up against Techno’s side, chuckling. He returns to his food, not noticing the absolute silence in the ring of people around him. When he peeks up, a spoonful of oats in his mouth, he frowns. Everyone looks utterly horrified. “What? Did I say somethin’? I know most people don’t go into Hardcore but it’s not *that* unheard of.”

The resounding silence does not do wonders for his confidence in himself. He swallows his bite, raising twin eyebrows and waiting for a response from quite literally anyone. The only two who don’t look particularly perturbed are Murdock and Wilson, but that does *not* help ease his anxiety.

“Ok— before we all overreact. What is...” Stark trails off, a strangled noise brought out of his lungs. He starts to look and sound a bit like a deflated balloon. “What is *Hardcore*?”

A blip of silence. Phil looks over at Techno with a frown, thumb pressed over his pulse point on his wrist, where a permanent blackened heart lies. It’s red around the edges, but two inky eyes are inlaid between its sections like gems.

“I mean— I was... *born* Hardcore. I never had more than my one life, and—”

“You have *more than one lives*?” Says Tony, interrupting Phil despite his promise of quiet. “You— you—”

Steve cuts him off with a severe glare. Techno, looking just as confused as Phil feels, scoots a little closer and presses his own wrist to Phil's. There, same as always, is one singular red heart. Phil was born Hardcore — Techno was born half mob. In traditional fashion, they both were left with only a single life to live.

“Most people do, yes,” Phil answers slowly, cautiously. “Three, actually. I was born with a defective that gave me a singular life and the ability to live— mostly forever, as long as I’m careful. Techno—”

“I’m more mob than human,” he says, with his human face marred by tusks, his hair a bright pink, his tail swishing behind him and hooves upon the ground. “I’m not hardcore — by all rights, I should *not* be alive. Somethin’ took a shine to me, though.’ He knocks on his head as if summoning the chatter within it. “So I’m still here, nearly as ancient as this old man, bruh —”

“Alright, *enough’a that—*” Phil shoves Techno hard in the side with his elbow, snickering, and continues his tale. “Now— bein’ Hardcore is not the same thing as goin’ Hardcore. Huge difference, actually. A Hardcore person only has one life. Someone who *goes* Hardcore adopts their lifestyle, but a bit... worse.”

He considers the life he once lived. It had been... good, in some ways. Awful in more. He’s known for it, now, and while it’s a better reputation than the one that being the Angel of Death brings, it still stings. He’d lost his entire *life*, his *home*, and come out a shrouded, paranoid, twitchy man with no idea how to function.

“A Hardcore world is a world where you only have one life. If you die, you’re spat back out into the real world all fresh and new and pretty. One catch — you’re completely isolated. I chose to go in there. Didn’t come back out until I got my shit absolutely *rocked*.”

A birdlike chuckle falls from his lips, but no one else is laughing. In fact, frightened and even disturbed expressions are shared pretty universally. Or, simply put, *worried*.

“How long?”

“Hm?” Phil turns to Peter, cocking his head at the question.

“How long were you... alone?” Peter croaks out, looking vaguely nauseous. His hands are fisted into the front of his shirt, a devastated expression on his childish face. He looks *pained*.

Phil is quick to stutter out another laugh, smiling once again, though he’s far less sure of himself anymore. There is no humor left in their circle, every single person there looking as if he’s just coughed up his own ghost. Even Techno doesn’t look at him, staring instead at the small heart tattooed onto his wrist.

“Uh— Not too long, mate. Five years, maybe five an’a half if you squint—”

“Fuckin’ - *five goddamn years!*” says Tony, voice so raw and confused that Phil flinches, jerking back and looking up at Techno, unsure of himself. “Ok, tweety, I can excuse some of

you two's weird quirks, but you spent five years in — in *complete isolation*? And then you up and *died*?" His face creases with *concern*, so stark and unlike the man that Phil feels knocked off-center. This time, even Steve doesn't attempt to calm him down, the man looking at Phil with a lost, saddened expression. "That's it. That's it, you two are getting therapy when we get back, that's a non-negotiable—"

"I'm—I'm not *broken* for that, you asshole," he hisses suddenly, fury's match struck in his chest. How dare they all look at him like this? Like they fucking *pity him*? He spent 5 years with only his own twisted mind for company and he walked out *alive*. Bruised and bended and exhausted, sure, but so connected with the world that Death herself applauded his ending. "I— that was my choice!"

It's silent. Phil glares at anyone who dares meet his eyes, twisting his head around and back and forth in an attempt to find *someone* who gets it. When none is offered, he turns to Techno instead.

There, to his horror, is the same expression as everyone else.

"Phil..." A soft sigh, as his *friend* rearranges his pity into something more fashionable. Phil's blood twists and turns to ice, the fear that Technoblade, too, pities him, filling him. "You—you know me. I've got the same amount of lives. But *five years*, man. It's *never* sat right with me. I understand the decision, but..."

Well. Phil stares for a moment longer, hoping his betrayal doesn't show. He's good enough at shutting down his own expression. He stands, setting his cup of oatmeal gingerly down on the seat beneath him. His wings ruffle, cheeks flushing and burning with the embarrassment of being singled out and having every single person staring *right at him*.

"I'm going for a walk," he says sharply, before he wanders out of the clearing and into the forest, not sparing anyone a single glance.

—

It had started, as most things always do, with a young boy and a father. Not a particularly special young boy and father, save for the myth that the Devil ran between them. It started with a street, and a truck, and an old man, and then darkness.

Matt Murdock has been blind since he was nine. He's spent some of that time being violently pitied by well-meaning yet overall quite overbearing nuns. He's spent some of that time throwing himself a dozen unearned pity parties. He's spent quite a bit of that time learning how to use his blindness.

That's not the expectation for all people who might be blind — but Matt's story started with something chemical and something burning and something that a less religious person would call fate. He'd mostly just call it divine intervention, but with a bit of a chuckle at the end.

But he has learned how to see in ways that almost no one else can. Sure, he gets pity, and he gets shock, and he gets *desire*, but there's nothing besides empty promises and the occasional potential between those things. And with Phil? He understands.

Clearly he doesn't get it all, but Matt knows how that sort of coddling pity works. How it feels to be bubble wrapped by people who merely put up with you. Of the sort of latent suicidalness that bubbles up in your chest until it's a constant, and you're forced to put a stop to it by killing yourself or committing something as close to suicide as you can get.

Philza Craft walks with a limp. He has what might best be described as a slightly lame leg. One of his wrists is twisted a bit farther than it should, the bone not quite right. His nose is slightly crooked and often gives him migraines. This, Matt has seen. Well— has smelled-felt-tasted or whatever else you would like to And so, to some extent, *he gets it*.

"Hey," he murmurs as he breaches the clearing that Philza has huddled himself into. Wade is on his arm, a leader to guide him through the trees — if only so that Matt can keep up his facade of utter blindness and useless senses. He's there on a promise to be quiet and let Matt talk, though, so it will be ok. He'll make sure it will be.

Craft's wings are spread out, rapidly flapping at the air around as he paces, teeth grit together and cheeks warm with what must be humiliation and anger. He snaps his head round as quick as an owl and at about the same sharp angle the moment Matt speaks, and his crumpled expression only deepens. He's mad. Getting madder.

"Th' fuck do you want?" He snarls, and Matt thanks God that Wilson doesn't attempt to answer. "Come to rub it in my face that you all finally think I'm a goddamn invalid?"

He manages to muster up a bit of a sardonic smile. "Well, no need to take his name in vain, Philza. And no. I haven't."

A pause. Phil seems to consider this, going silent even as he still paces. He blows a gust of air through his lips, more of a huff than a sigh, and then stops, footsteps going silent save for the occasional twitch of the leaves beneath him. Matt cocks his head, staring curiously, eyes shut behind his glasses. Once his body temperature has fallen below practically boiling and his jaw has unwound itself, Matt continues speaking to the avian.

"I'm just gonna sit, ok? Come and sit with me. I just want to talk. Can't exactly see what's going on like this, though," Matt says, gesturing to his glasses, despite the fact that everyone in the clearing knows just how much he can see. He slides out of Wade's grip, nodding off to the side, before he slips down onto the ground, catlike and silent.

Philza's descent is anything but quiet. Both of his knees pop, and he hisses quietly, a bit like a displaced cat. Matt simply waits until he hears the thump of a body against the leaves, and then he speaks.

"First off— as your lawyer, I think I'm legally obligated to tell you to not murder anyone out there right now," he begins, in as bland a voice as ever. Phil lets out a snarky little chuckle. "But let me explain. None of them are... Well. I'm going to assume you've assumed they're pitying you. And I can tell you that they are not."

Phil's heart rate spikes. A rustle as he twists(?) No— grabs a couple of leaves. Crushes them. Holds them like a lifeline. Lets them go with a bit of a snarl. "What do you call all that, then?" He demands. "Lookin' at me like I— like I can't fuckin' handle myself?"

“Well, I didn’t see their exact expressions, but I can tell you from experience that the Avengers — and very likely Technoblade, too — are *not* the type to pity you.” He clears his throat, looking over at Wade with a bit of a grin. They *both* know. “Clint knows Daredevil is blind. Doesn’t know he’s me — but still treats Daredevil like any other person. Clint himself is deaf. Coincidentally, the only reason he knows I’m blind is because I told him. I couldn’t figure out how to sign and I didn’t want to make a total offensive ass out of myself.”

“And everyone in the Avengers is more than used to me rambling to myself!” Says Wade brightly. “And they humor it. Mostly. Except for when I hurl slurs. Only the ones I’m *allowed* to say, of course—”

“Enough,” Matt says with a roll of his eyes. He turns back to Phil. “Look. You’ve known Technoblade for...”

“A long ass time.”

“A long ass time,” Matt agrees succinctly, crossing his legs. “What makes you think that after all this time, he’s going to get up and start treating you like a kid? And for what— because you braved isolation? Because you spent five years completely alone and made it back out to the other side?”

He continues before Phil can respond, though it’s clear he wants to. “Clint knows Daredevil is blind. Clint is deaf. Neither of those things hold us back — but they sure are a little scary, from someone who has never experienced the loss of their senses. Now— I’ve spent a regrettable amount of time in total isolation. Not five whole years, but a long time.” Matt stretches one hand out, waving it up and down in Phil’s general direction. “You’re young. A little battle-worn, sure, a little traumatized— but in the end, no one, especially not someone your age, should have to go through 5 years completely alone just to prove a point.”

“Well I *wanted to*-”

“Not the point,” Matt replies with a dismissive wave.

“One time *I* wanted to kill myself!” Says Wade cheerily, adding a raspberry onto the end. “And I did! It did not work. Hurting yourself to prove that you’re not weak is, as young Mr. Parker would probably put it — or his friends, now that I think about it, or the funny dudes up in Technoblade’s head — “Pussy shit.”

“That’s not to say that whatever you got out of that Hardcore world — or isolation, or whatever you want to call it — is bad,” Matt adds on quickly. “But now that you’re out of it, you *know* that the people around you will treat you seriously. You’ve nearly died several times out here already. The Avengers have an immense amount of respect for you and Techno, Phil. Them being concerned for your wellbeing doesn’t at all mean that they pity you.”

A moment of silence. The crumpled leaves in Phil’s hand fall to the ground, and he sighs. Some of the tension in his muscles loosen as he lets out another heavy breath, one hand coming up to brush through the great buzz of feathers on his back that Matt can never quite

understand. He'd love to feel them, someday. Not today, though. He'll ask. Later. *Definitely* not today.

"It's just— agh. Complicated."

"I have a feeling you aren't very used to anyone but Technoblade caring about you at all, so multiple people actually giving a shit about your existence is a little overwhelming, right?"

Phil turns to Wade and gives him what Matt can only assume is a *violent* glare.

"Alright, *maybe*," admits the avian, grumbling as he rearranges his limbs and attempts to hide his embarrassment. (His doubt, says something in Matt's mind, because it's far harder to hide self-hatred from someone else who knows it all too well.) "Maybe it's a little fuckin' weird. Techno is— Techno is more than a friend to me. Not in *that* way," he explains hastily, "I *do* have a wife, and I just— yknow what. I don't need to explain. Techno just *is*. He's been all I've had for a long time."

His feathered ears twitch to the side. Phil looks up, and there—

"Lo, mate," he says slightly sullenly as Technoblade steps into the clearing, hands in his pockets and head hung lower than usual. "Don't suppose I can convince you to not eavesdrop?"

"I only did a little," is his response, plus a little chuckle that sounds more than slightly self-deprecating. "Uhh— I'm not gonna apologize, man. Cause you get a lil'... twitchy, every time anyone brings up Hardcore. I think Stark is right. About both of us, maybe. Therapy."

"Yeah, mate, if I need that shit then you need a *double*," Phil snarks back, though he must pat the ground or gesture for Techno to come closer, because the man does, tail whipping behind him. "Just— uh. It's hard, sometimes. When everyone else is lookin' at me like I'm broken and then I glance over and see the same shit on you."

"*Never*," is the immediate reply. "Gods, Phil, without totems I would've died a dozen times over now."

"Oh, give yourself a bit more credit—"

"Phil, I am Dead serious." That must mean more than it does to Matt, because Philza's heart rate spikes. For some reason, when Technoblade says it, it sounds as if the "Dead" is capitalized. Is *important*. "I don't pity you for what happened in Hardcore. Or fer havin' one life. You know that much. I just— I *worry*, man. *Bruh*. That's awkward to admit."

Wade whispers something that sounds vaguely like "*ooo— Emotional constipation—*" and is cut off when Matt kicks his side. Hard. He may or may not slump in on himself and start whining.

"Uh— actually." Phil clears his throat and looks over at the two outsiders in their discussion. "Can you guys... like... Uh..."

“Oh— uh— sure, yeah, hold on—” There’s a wet snap as Wade rearranges one of his bones and sits up, a heated expression shot Matt’s way.

They leave quickly. Matt tucks his arm back into Wade’s and they step out, crunching through the fallen leaves. Matt easily focuses back on the noises at the campfire instead of the conversation of the ones behind him, listening to the crackle of flames and the hushed, undisturbed chatter of the circle.

“Everything ok?” Asks Peter worriedly, standing up the moment that Matt and Wade breach the clearing. He wrings his hand in front of him, guilt clear in his voice.

“I think they’re gonna be fine,” Matt reassures him with a quirk of his lips, smiling, both fond and a bit exasperated. The Avengers, for all they boast of maturity, can be handfuls. And anyways— when Technoblade and Phil return ten minutes later, hand in hand, he’s proven right.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! This is RAI, Christmas edition, only two days late LOL. This chapter, I will warn y'all, is angsty. It doesn't start out happy and Christmassy and sweet, but I promise promise promise there is fluff. Christmas and the holidays are often really hard for people. Myself included, sometimes. I wanted to emulate that for Phil in here, so heed that warning, please.

Anyways: I worked super hard on this chapter and it is actually,,,, really long HAHA I had to split it! So if you guys are willing to leave me a comment telling me what you think, I'd love love love that.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They already sort of know what Christmas is. Keyword— sort of. It goes by a different name in their world, and the customs seem quite different — more of what this world calls paganism — but Peter and his friends seem quite excited for the upcoming holiday all through the camping trip. When Phil shows them an especially shiny rock that has caught his attention, MJ murmurs something about buying the avian crystals. When Techno attempts to fistfight a bear — only stopping when he's tackled by Wade — Steve says something about getting him a punching bag. It's all very odd— and it's then that Techno and Phil both make the connection to the winter solstice.

So they investigate.

Their first target is Steve. He's reasonably religious and civil, and so when Phil walks up to him and bluntly asks what the hell is Christmas, Steve's first reaction is to tell him not to swear, and then go completely pale at the idea that they don't know what the holiday is.

After that, when Phil repeats the question in a slightly more demanding voice, he gains a bit of a mischievous look and just shakes his head like he's planning something. When the two see him conspiring with Tony later, it only cements in their minds that they need to figure out what it is soon.

When they ask Matt, he immediately goes on a spiel about someone named Jesus and the birth of a messiah — which Wade very rudely interrupts with something about the moon landing being a hoax and Christmas being a money-spending gimmick. The two get into an argument. A *violent* argument. Matt procures a knife. The two move on.

In the end, it's Natasha, Clint, and Sam who manage to give them a proper explanation. They seem to have given up on their card games, moving instead to a game of solitaire that

somehow seems to have three different players playing the one-person game at once. When the question is posed, they all pause.

“These idiots didn’t explain it to you?” Sam asks in disbelief, casting a glance around the entire group. Steve and Tony are still whispering to each other. Wade is passed out on the ground with a knife in his side. Sam groans loudly and sets his cards down. “Of course. Of course these dysfunctional *fu*—”

“Christmas,” interrupts Natasha cheerily, slapping a card down onto the game of solitaire which makes Clint yet out a sharp *yes* of excitement. “Yule, for you two, I’m assuming?”

“Uh— yeah. Seems about the same,” Techno replies. “The whole tree thing, bonfires, Odin and whatever, though it seems like the guy’s a lot weirder here.”

“Right.” A nod. “Well, Christmas is what came out of Christianity, basically. That is— Christianity sort of decided the holiday was theirs now. It’s a nice enough time, though.”

Clint whistles as he chucks another dollar bill into a pile — since when does solitaire have betting? — and then turns up to them. “Yeah, what she said. Tradition is— a big old white guy in a red suit comes in your house and puts presents under your tree.”

“Like— like Iron Man?” Phil stutters, brow twisted and head tilted in confusion.

Clint and Sam both laugh, while Natasha uses their distraction to peak at both their cards before she sets a new one down.

“Not quite! His name is Santa Claus— and he’s not actually real. More of a tradition to scare kids into being nice,” Sam explains, much to Phil and Technoblade’s extended confusion. “Ah— man, not like that. He’s a big ole’ - yknow, jolly fat guy. Anyways, people put presents for each other under the tree and on Christmas they all open em’ up and give the gifts around.”

“Why under the *tree*?” Phil inquires, sounding slightly distressed. “Why not — why not in a more comfy way!”

“Oh— you get to decorate it with shiny things,” Clint replies as he puts down what seems to be a winning card. He shouts in joy, conversation forgotten. With that last addition, though, Phil seems satisfied enough to leave it alone.

So — gift giving. Like a birthday, but you’re celebrating the birthday of Christianity taking over a holiday and also a small baby Messiah and you give the gifts to your friends, not the birthday-havers. Techno and Phil are both more used to burning sacrificial lambs and such around the time of the solstice as an offering to whatever the hell is up in the sky. That’s about the closest to wintery birthday traditions as they get, but perhaps the reason why their world is so dangerous is that *they* never had a baby messiah to get born and then— and then to die? They still aren’t straight on the narrative.

So — *gift giving*.

Neither of them has money. Not really — not any money that isn't Stark's. But when Phil asks Jarvis on one incredibly boring day, the android is more than willing to oblige, and they are very quickly set up with cards with fancy names and no limits. Then, they get to use *Amazon*.

For the better part of a random thirty minutes Vision has to help them set up an account. Somehow they manage to download a virus onto the computer that renders it a chunk of dead metal. After that, Vision stops helping and simply does it himself.

Amazon is stupid.

After they realize that the website has absolutely fucking nothing of substance, they decide to ask Vision if he wants to go out Christmas shopping with them. Which at first seems like an absolutely wonderful idea, because they pile into a car and go into a little bakery as their first stop, and *oh*—

It's a small place got Pigeon Coffee. When they step inside, buried in heavy coats, Phil's wings snug and comfy against his back, it smells of cinnamon and coffee and chocolate and some soft, almost floral scent. It isn't all that busy. A few tables are occupied near the window, peering out into the street. The lighting is a soft yellow hue and some cheery classical tune filters through the surprisingly high-quality speakers.

"Alright, you two. The way this works is that you look at the things on the boards and pick out what you want. You tell them—" Vision points up to the person manning an odd white device in which people slot their money-cards. "-And then pay, and they'll make it for you, ok?"

"So like a cafeteria with money," Techno says, nodding seriously. The white pompom on his bright purple hat bounces up and down as he moves. He's the first one to brave the counter, even though Vision looks a bit nervous and it is evident the hybrid's comparison wasn't perfectly accurate.

From his spot waiting, Philza observes this transaction.

"Hello there! What can I get for you?" Says a kind voice as the cashier plunks their hands down onto the counter.

"Hi," says Techno, before pausing for about ten seconds. Then, he goes ramrod straight as if he's only just remembered to order. "Oh. Uh. A Moe-chae."

"A mocha?"

"Yes. A mocha. And. And a cinnamon roll. Please."

The person's face brightens up. It's clear that though Technoblade's manners are not the best, his awkwardness makes up for it.

"Alright! What size on that mocha?"

"Big." He clears his throat awkwardly. "Big one."

“And... can I get a name?”

“Tttt— uh. Tech-no... Tech. Uh. Yeah. Tech.”

This time the person clearly is laughing a little bit. But they oblige regardless, long black hair bouncing around their shoulders as they write the name down and talking Technoblade through the process of purchasing.

It's then that something strikes Phil as odd. He feels as if somehow, he recognizes the person. Something about their long, long hair, clearly well taken care of, a deep, rich shade of black. It passes over the person's cheeks, full and pink with joy. They look up for a single second as they see Phil staring, and he realizes.

They look a bit like Kristin.

Phil decides he doesn't want to order anymore.

After that, the trip simply doesn't feel right. He thinks Techno must notice, because he's a little quieter, a little more physically affectionate as they trail through stores. Phil tries to keep himself in high spirits, but the jarring experience of suddenly seeing someone that looks *so similar* to the one person you love...?

It's awful. It sends his heart skating across ice until it simply can't and it drops, heavy and hard, into his stomach. It occupies his every thought, his shopping distracted, playing second fiddle to the thought of the one person he truly wants and yet knows he can never have.

That's part of what was so wonderful about Yule, traditionally. The world would be so incredibly close to the Gods that near to the solstice. Technoblade would go out and hunt for an entire day and an entire night, communing with the God in his own head all the while. Phil, whose love took far more craft, would spend a full week crafting an elaborate ritual to only see his wife for a single night.

But here in this foreign world, the Gods have not graced him in a long time. His prayers have gone unanswered. All that is left is the jagged obsidian ring on his finger and the voices in his friend's head.

And, to his utter shame, that persistent feeling of emptiness — of *loss* — persists far after that one trip outside, that one small thing that affected him far too much.

Because Gods above, Phil *misses his wife*.

It starts with him simply being a little bit sadder. Something easily hidden behind the mask of his *usual* depression, which he's starting to accept definitely isn't something people are usually able to so efficiently cover up.

He doesn't want to worry the Avengers. He doesn't want to worry Peter. Most of all, he can't stand to worry Technoblade, who has enough problems and worries to deal with right now without Phil adding his irrational sense of mourning to them.

So, he carefully covers up the absence within him, and he carries on.

He's quite good at it and he knows it. Suppression comes easy when you've been doing it since birth. It starts with simply avoiding any mention or thought of Kristin. He *hates it*. Technoblade certainly must notice this first step, too, when Phil takes his wedding ring off and tucks it into his dresser draw. He doesn't want to look down at his hand and immediately feel that sea of *nothingness* in his chest, pounding up against his ribs like the ocean to a fragile island.

And, it helps. Helps in the way that cutting an infected limb off your body does. He doesn't look down to his left finger and he isn't able to find comfort in that obsidian, perfectly crafted, made especially for him. He finds a small ring of discolored flesh. The ring has been there for so long that his hands have darkened around it. That too will fade with time.

But soon enough this proves to be not quite enough. It's not that he wants the ring back — *oh God, he burns without it, but he's so practiced at lying to himself that it doesn't matter* — or that he's started to think of her more without prompting. It is, simply enough, the holiday.

From what he's gathered, Christmas is a time of being around your family. Of cherishing those around you and giving to them, receiving in return, signs of your adoration. Yule had been that for him once. He'd sacrificed meals to the flames and stoked those fires for days and sacrificed whole animals, all for the quickly approaching Death of the seasons. That had been his gift giving ritual. That is how he showed appreciation to the one he loved the most.

There is none of that, here. If he hadn't noticed the absence of any Godly presence here before, he certainly has now.

He sees what he's missing in the way that Peter and MJ sometimes turn to give each other brief pecks on the cheeks, quick and hesitant. Phil sees himself and sees Kristin and sees them in a love only just begun, though just as strong. He stays silent and bites his cheek when Tony flirts with Pepper, the two of them perhaps not in love, but perhaps so fond of each other that they couldn't possibly not be.

And throughout it all, it's as if something inside of him has begun to die.

The mask curls up tighter against his until he clutches its straps between his teeth, scraping his gums until they bleed down his jaw.

Phil starts to avoid Techno, too. His friend doesn't remind him of Kristin — but there's awful, unjustified jealousy inside of him that reminds him that Technoblade still has a bit of his God. They'd never had the bond that Kristin had with Phil, but even so, Techno had been left with the chatter in his head, a gift given to him by a presence that hadn't been quite so violently ripped away.

It's not that he doesn't like being around Techno. In fact, right now, his instincts scream for him to cling to his friend, to speak of his frustrations, to find some way to cope. But Philza's problems are not his friend's, so he says nothing, and when Techno enters the room, he tries to leave.

He thinks the Avengers must have begun to notice.

This Christmas thing proceeds as it always must, though. Tony and Steve take him and Technoblade tree shopping — which Phil is unfortunately not able to opt-out of without gaining suspicion. At first it's beautiful, the furry trees scaling the skies, covered in a thin dusting of snow, so reminiscent of the arctic they'd come from.

Phil wanders off at one point to go look by himself. He sees too much of Her forest within the evergreens and firs and pines. He hunches his shoulders and rejoins the others and pretends he didn't see anything of worth.

He doesn't like joining the communal Avengers floor after that. The tree is *gorgeous*. Hung in spiraling trains of popcorn and tinsel that Peter and Natasha had spent hours constructing. Glittering rainbow lights that turn the branches all different colors and shine like multicolored stars. Presents that accumulate beneath it after only ten minutes of it being put up.

While he does have his gifts for other people, he feels that they're likely not as good as they could be. When amazon and the stores he'd visited proved to be unhelpful, he'd scoured his inventory and found what he thought he could give to people there. An old dagger of his, carved with cobwebs and spiraling spider designs, the blade sprinkled with a bit of knockback — the only thing he thinks would be useful if Peter ever actually needed to use it. He used a bit of lapis and netherite in its liquid form to create a sort of nail armor for Natasha. Like her nail polish, but if she wanted to backhand someone, it'd probably kill them.

Those gifts are wormed under the tree when no one else is there. Even if he himself knows he's not doing well, he won't drag everyone else down with him.

Tony and Bruce get large pieces of ancient debris, which they'd both seemed quite interested in studying when Technoblade explained it to them. Steve gets a pair of hand-knit socks with feather falling imbued in them — because *Gods*, does that man take a lot of leaps. Peter helps Phil find Matt's armor dealer and work out a deal with the man. He goes home with a netherite version of the man's helmet.

Vision gets an amazon giftcard (he knows it's cheesy, but the android seems a little obsessed with the sight.) Wanda gets a hand-knit pair of gloves, bright red with black flowers embroidered onto the wrist — sewn in by Technoblade.

Technoblade. He is a little bit more complicated.

Phil's piglin hybrid friend had an extensive collection of cloaks, jackets, coats, and other things to keep him warm back in their empire. While they've all but exchanged most of their clothes from their past for t-shirts and jeans and boots and such, Phil still can see in his friend's eyes that Techno misses his cloaks. (He tries not to think about how most of them had been sewn by Phil himself.)

So, he employs Wanda's help in procuring a high-quality, thick sort of fabric that can work well enough to hold a bit of magic. She orders it for him, and in return, he shows her how to sew as he works his needle through the fabric, a deep red that seems to flow over his hands like water. She ends up very interested in how he embroiders his own custom golden thread

through the edges, an old creation imbued with lapis so he can thread magic through the fabric as well.

So, he teaches her how to embroider. In return, she goes to Tony and asks him to find the highest quality fake fur he can find — because she doesn't like killing animals and because Phil prefers to hunt for his own skins, which he can't really do here.

In the end, it's beautiful.

A floor-length red cloak, the edges all sewn with golden stories. They all correspond with Technoblade and who he is — from the Nether, to his first Hunt, to the God he is connected to, to even the first time he and Phil had met. Along the hood are intricately woven runes, imbuing the fabric with fire protection and unbreaking and even just a tiny bit of thorns — enough to dissuade any hostile hit but still accept any kind ones.

He's in a rough place. As he folds the perfect creation and wraps it in paper he cries, just a little, and thinks about just how much he *misses* his *friend*.

But Phil perseveres regardless, afraid to reach out and afraid to withdraw. It's not right for him to bring his misery around when everyone else is so *happy*. It's not right for him to bottle it up either, he knows this, but Gods be damned he'll do what he *wants*.

Maybe it's the holidays themselves that hurt. He wonders if without his wife the solstice would be much more difficult — and then he remembers the times before it. The times far too similar to the ones now. Where he'd been alone. Where he'd been so, so tired. Where the only hunger within him was the hunger for Death to take him — before he'd ever met her.

(He thinks of a time even before that. Of hands in his wings and cuffs upon his wrists and needles in his skin and a question, a desperate *question* — of “*How is this freak alive?*”)

It's stupid. The memories are just memories. He still finds no comfort in sleep and no appetite in his stomach.

The rest of the Avengers have begun to notice. He doesn't care.

Phil just needs to live through this Christmas and then things will be ok. He knows it. But as he stops eating stops sleeping stops speaking he starts to wonder— how much longer can this continue?

Sam invites him to bake with him, worry in his voice when Phil brushes him off with a cracked and pinched grin and immediately leaves the kitchen. Vision asks if he and Technoblade would like to watch a movie and Phil's stomach turns and he just says *no*. Clint tries to bring him into the vents, tries to introduce Phil to the utterly mesmerizing nests scattered around it, so comfortable looking he could cry.

He starts staying in his room to avoid them. The ring in his dresser drawer taunts him. Nowhere is safe. He's a stupid, foolish bird who has trapped himself between a rock and another rock and a sword is pointed right at his neck.

Even Jarvis starts encouraging him to take care of himself, which must clue Phil into how much of a state he's in, but it doesn't matter. Take a shower. Take a nap. Try the cookies Bruce baked — even if they're burnt. Phil can't escape the other people in the tower. He stays up all night and only sleeps when his system crashes and he eats like a bird, truly, his stomach tied into knots of guilt and regret and the burning need within him to be with— be with his—

With his *flock*.

He so desperately wants Kristin. Wants to see her even if for just a second, just to cement in his mind that she is still with him. He wants to pull Techno in for a massive hug and braid his hair and tell him how much he loves him. He wants— he even wants to see the Avengers, even though the thought makes shame burn within him. He's gotten so fucking attached to these people so quickly and it's *pathetic*.

Phil wants a drink.

—

Tony realizes that things were worse than they all thought when Jarvis has to intervene.

It's nearly four in the morning, the day before Christmas Eve, when he is alerted to the fact that Philza is currently rooting around in the alcohol on the Avenger's communal floor. It's the first time he's been out of his room in several days, too.

By the time Tony's recent project is sealed up and saved and he's able to get down there, the man is already halfway through an entire bottle of brandy. It looks like he'd tried to pour himself a shot and then forgotten he was drinking alcohol and poured himself an entire cup. It's expensive, high-quality brandy too, and that's why Tony isn't actually surprised to see that the man is thoroughly sloshed already.

Phil is sitting on the couch with his glass in his hand, the bottle of brandy in the other. It's then that Tony sees the empty bottle of wine rolling around under his socked feet as well, and he realizes that he has a very drunk offworlder on his hands.

His first impulse is to call up Technoblade. For as fond as Tony is of the avian, he does not know how to handle this situation properly. He doesn't want to say the wrong thing or freak the guy out or make this all *worse*, God forbid. But the two seem to be fighting right now, and he doesn't know that Technoblade would be the best person for Phil to be around.

Tony does know how it feels to have a hard time around the holidays, though.

Grief is ever-present in his heart around Christmas. For so many things. For his mother. For his father, sometimes, and the fact that Tony never had a chance to try and heal from what was so broken between them. For the Jarvis that was there before the AI. For Peggy's memory, so degraded she hardly remembers him anymore. For everything that has been shattered and broken in his life.

Once upon a time he would've picked up a good bottle of scotch and joined Philza on the couch. It's still tempting. Once the door that is alcoholism is open, it never truly closes. The urges remain, no matter how much you train them out of yourself. And, as he looks at Phil and sees himself in the man, he almost gives in.

But Tony has support. Tony has been sober for over a year and a half now, and he doesn't ever want to break that streak. For Pepper, for Peter, for the Avengers. For himself. So, he slides down onto the couch next to Phil and speaks.

"Drinking alone, huh?" He asks in a soft voice, a mirthless chuckle teasing his lips. Philza's eyes are glassy and unseeing as they peer out into the empty night sky. When Tony sits, though, his head snaps to the side, his pupils dilating as he registers the man beside him.

"Steve says s' a free country," slurs Phil, a wry grin spreading across his face. He lifts his cup again and downs the rest of it with quick gulps, not even reacting to the burn. Tony can't tell if that's cause the guy's tolerance is high as hell or he's just so drunk he doesn't taste it anymore. Neither is a particularly good thing. "You can join, yknow?"

Tony fakes a smile and takes the offered bottle of alcohol out of Phil's hand, twisting his hand around it and bringing it to his lips. He keeps his mouth closed and swallows his own spit. None of the alcohol leaves the bottle as he sets it down on the table beside the couch.

"So," he replies succinctly, slapping a hand down on Phil's shoulder and ignoring the giggle he's given. "What's got you so— so eager to lose yourself so close to the holidays?"

That giggle grows until Phil is crowing with laughter, shouldering Tony's hand away and bending over, only uncurling when he takes another drink. It makes Tony's hands itch to reach out and take the cup. The man's knotted, unbrushed hair frames his pale skin, the purple under his eyes and the way his cheeks look just a little too thin. There are tears in his eyes.

"Mm— *Death*," he giggles, and Tony has half a mind to tell Jarvis to get Technoblade before the man continues. "Mm— my— my *wife*. *Death*. You ever met— you ever met *Death*, Stark, she's the most beautiful thing *ever*."

Tony's only job had once been to be the Merchant of Death. To sell that concept to the world. He's met Death, yes, in far more ways than most. So he nods, mouth opening and then shutting when Phil continues far too quickly to respond.

"She's not— not dead, no, uh— Peter thought that. She's just *Death*. The prettiest *Death* I've ever seen. The fuckin' love of m' life is— is *Death*," he says with a slightly more sober sounding laugh, head tipping back to rest on the back of the couch again. His wings shiver behind him.

Phil doesn't speak for a long moment. In that period of silence, Tony reaches across to the coffee table and plucks up a blanket, unfolding it and tossing it over the avian's wings and back. It covers his shoulders and gets quickly lost among his legs, and it's then that Tony is reminded of just how *small* the man is. Philza may have already proven himself to be a

strong, hardened warrior — but sitting here, glassy eyes gazing at all the dying stars outside, he looks tiny.

“I. I miss her.” His head twists on the couch until he’s staring right at Tony. His adam’s apple bobs up and down as he swallows, hand slipping on the cup still between his legs. Tony reaches over and takes the empty glass, and Philza doesn’t fight it. He does let out a soft, sad sort of noise, wings folding further against his back. “I miss— miss Tech. Miss’m both.”

“Do you want me to go get him?” Tony asks softly, starting to realize just how drunk Philza must be if he’s spilling all of this. The only times he’s ever gotten a glimpse of these emotions are when the two offworlders are too worked up to hide them. But this version of Phil still seems to have enough sense to him to hold himself together — and yet he’s trusting Tony. For that, relief swells in his chest.

“No— no, no, please don’t,” Phil says suddenly, rising up off the couch, the blanket falling off as his bloodshot eyes go wide. He brings his thumb to his mouth and starts biting at the skin around his claws, a nervous tick. “Don’- can’t bother him, can’t, I don’t want to bother him, Stark, I don’t—”

“That’s ok,” he says quickly, holding his hands up in placation, gently pushing Philza back down onto the couch. The avian lets out a warbling noise that sounds both confused and frightened, but he nods anyway, sinking back into the cushions. “Why... Uh, if you don’t mind me asking, why don’t you want to see him? Don’t you miss him?”

Phil’s eyes flutter shut and he snuffles, nodding sharply. “Uhm— yeah. Yeah I— I do. I miss’m. Miss ‘em both. But— but I can’t go to’m. Don’ wanna make him sad.”

“And why would you bein’ near him make him sad?”

“Cause— cause I’m all— I’m a *mess*, ” Phil replies, gesturing to himself. “An’ he doesn’t like when— when I’m sad. And. And when I miss’er. Miss Kristin. I—” he chokes off, hands lifting to his face, holding it as he shakes, shoulders hunched. “I’m never goin’ to see her again, am I? St— Stark, I’m— I’m never ever going to see her again. She’s— she’s gon’, pr’bably thinks I— Thinks I abandoned her.”

The dam breaks. That tiny confession must break down everything Phil has been worrying about for — for *however long this has been going on, how long has he been hiding this? How did no one notice?* — all this time. A whimpering sort of noise slips between his teeth just as he suppresses it with a hand across his mouth, and he bows over, shuddering once, twice, before he lets out a muffled sob.

“M’ terrible, I— I *left her*, an’ she— she’s gone, I can’t— can’t see her, can’t— I can’t even *feel her anymore*, ” Philza wails, breaking down, looking up at Tony with tears suddenly streaming down his face, voice so thick and choked as to be nigh unintelligible. “I wan’- wanna see her, I want to— just for *one second*, please, *please*—”

He lurches forward and grabs Tony’s collar, tugging the man closer. They’re eye to eye now, the engineer with a sad glint to his own, the avian’s looking as if he’s just been told his wife *died* — and, by the sound of it, he might as well have been.

“M’... M’ beggin’ you, S— Stark— Stark *please*,” he babbles out, shaking Tony back and forth. It’s a miserable sight, as Phil lets out another breathless sob, and Tony lifts his own hands, gently tugging Philza’s off of his shirt. “Jus— Jus’ for one secon’... Jus— let me— let me *see ‘er, please—*”

Tony is glad to see Philza able to express his emotions. But not at all like this. Not when the man is drunk as hell and sobbing about something Tony doesn’t even understand. Not when his words trail off into completely warped babbling, things that he thinks must be in different languages altogether.

And here, he doesn’t know what to do. Tony can mend so many broken things. Can take metal into his hands and weave life within it. Can breathe bits of his souls into his creations. But this? This isn’t one of his projects. This isn’t Jarvis or one of his bots or even Vision, who is so complex you can hardly just reduce him to *metal*. This is a living, breathing, traumatized man in a world that isn’t his own. This is Philza, who refuses to tell anyone what’s wrong or what he needs or anything at all, really. This is Philza, breaking down on Tony’s couch at God knows what time at night.

But Tony has been here too.

Drunk and grieving. Begging for someone who doesn’t even understand what’s going on to let him go, to bring someone back or let him join them. Breaking down over the tiniest thing, perhaps even on this exact day, this exact time, many years ago. He may not *know*, but he *understands*.

And so, ever so gently, he stretches his arms out, slipping them beneath Phil’s own. He bends them over the man’s shoulders, folding his hands on top of each other, pulling the avian forward. Phil doesn’t protest as Tony starts to run one hand up and down his back, bringing the two of them so close together that Phil’s head lands in the crook of the mechanic’s neck, their chests pressed together on the couch.

Tony isn’t who Phil wants. He isn’t even who he needs. But he’s *someone*, and that seems to be enough.

Philza *sobs*, shuddering apart entirely, broken shards of glass and twisted metal and a shield too beaten to work anymore. His hands paw at Tony’s chest until they stay there, a barrier between the two, his own chest heaving with completely unrestrained cries.

“M’sorry, *m’sorry*, jus— jus’ want her back, just— you— you *don’t— you don’ know how much it—* ghh— *ghhf— fff—fucking ‘urts*, it h— hurts, Stark, it’s *burning*,” he rambles, tears soaking through Tony’s shirt and getting his skin wet as well.

He doesn’t mind. He doesn’t quite understand everything that’s happening, but he understands *grief*, so he simply raises a hand and brushes it through Phil’s hair, letting the man break down.

“I’m sorry, kid,” he murmurs, because for however old Philza is, he’s still so, terribly young, and Tony sees himself inside of him. Sees his own grief, sees his own foolhardiness within the avian, no matter how dissimilar in other ways they are. He tugs Phil forward a little more

until they're sitting right beside each other, the avian's curled up knees half in his lap, their chests pressed together, Phil's head still resting on his shoulder as Tony pets his head and holds him tight. "I know. I know it hurts."

Phil keeps going like that for an amount of time that Tony doesn't dare inquire about. It doesn't matter, anyways. If Philza's one support system isn't available right now, Tony will try his best to be there in Technoblade's stead. He knows it's not his right. He knows he's probably not helping much. But God *fucking* damn him, he's grown incredibly fond of the two in a fast amount of time and he hates it.

But eventually, it seems that however long Philza has been holding off on sleeping starts to catch up to him. His violent, desperate cries taper off into something softer, more hitches-of-breath and choking hiccups instead of the awful things he's been letting out thus far. Tony feels him start to go limp, too, hands sliding off of his chest.

"Hey, birdbrain," Tony murmurs as he tugs Phil upwards off the couch, finally seeing his face again. His round puffy eyes, the red flush on his cheeks, the warm, feverish flush to his skin. Even half-asleep already, Phil manages to nod in response. "I can't get you Kristin. And I'm sorry about that, I really am. But do you want me to get you your buddy Technoblade right now? I think he's been really worried about you."

It takes a moment for the question to register. Phil sways a little, before he falls back onto the couch, out of Tony's steadying arms. He nods, though, knees curling up to his chest. There isn't enough room in his position, though, so his feet just slide off the couch and he lies there, slumped over, looking slightly pathetic.

Nothing else needs to be said. One of Jarvis's sensor lights go off in a light blue shade to confirm that he's already alerted the other offworlder. Tony stands from the couch and starts to clean up as Phil sits there, unmoving, eyes half-lidded. He picks up the bottle on the ground and the one on the table and the cup there, too. Temptation is there in the back of his mind— but he just dumps the cup out and washes it, slipping the brandy back into the small bar under the island.

The elevator doors slide open. There stands Technoblade in his boxers and a stained t-shirt, ears and tail drooping towards the ground, a miserable expression on his face. Nothing needs to be said — it's like he just *senses* where Phil is, rushing over to the couch and scooping up the avian in an instant.

Phil shudders, then snuffles, burying his face in Technoblade's chest with another pathetic warble. He starts to murmur something. Technoblade murmurs something back, sounding as if he too is about to cry. Tony begins to feel like he's intruding — but he doesn't trust the two to stay safe while alone right now.

There isn't much else to do, though. He busies himself with a cookie recipe and tunes out the sounds of mourning in the background.

—

"You're so stupid."

Technoblade's first words to Phil when he finds himself squished in a massive half-piglin hug. He's a little bit too drunk to remember it, but Techno is sure to repeat it later on.

"You know you're an actual idiot, right?" He says in a stern voice, with only a little bit of teasing to it. Phil is wrapped up in blankets and sandwiched between the end of the couch and his friend, eating a half-burnt cookie that Tony had baked in the hours before Phil sobered up. Yes, he's incredibly mortified that he drunkenly broke down in Iron Man's arms. No, that doesn't mean he won't accept cookies.

"Yeah," Phil replies dryly, before snuggling in closer to Techno's side. "Yeah I just—"

"No justs."

"But—"

"No buts either!" Techno cries, smacking Phil gently upside his head. "You lockin' yerself away in your room is bad, but the whole not eating and not sleeping thing is even worse. Why didn't you *say somethin'*, Phil?"

By the end of his rant, Technoblade's voice has softened. It sounds far more worried than anything like he's blaming himself for Phil's own pathetic negligence. The hand that had playfully knocked at Phil's head now rests on the back of his neck, even as he leans over and buries himself in his knees. The sadness in his friend's voice is perhaps the worst part — because everything Phil had done was meant to *prevent that*.

"Jus' didn't wanna get you all worried, mate," he murmurs back. Technoblade scoffs.

"I'm sure as hell worried now, Phil," replies the man, words rumbling in his chest. "Is this all just about...?"

"Yeah," Phil rasps right back. "Uhm— Kristin. I know I can't see her this year, and I know it's dumb to get so worked up over, but—"

"Stop with the *buts!*" Techno cries, throwing a hand up. It's clear he's joking around, though, because he has a bit of a wry smile upon his lips. It's clear he's starting to understand. Phil is very glad he's mostly sober for this conversation. "It's not *dumb*. I may not get the sorta romance thing you two have, but I know if I couldn't see my best friend durin' the solstice I'd be awfully sad."

Phil laughs huffily when Techno nudges his shoulder to really hammer the point in. He starts to chew on the back of his thumb — then moves to his cookie, breaking off a bite with a pitiful "*bwoosh*" and then eating it like a sad kitten eats food. Pitifully.

"I'm sorry that you can't see her, man. It's— *Bruh*, I miss her too, and I've only met her a handful of times. I miss her *for* you." Techno heaves out a sigh, shuffling closer and wrapping an arm around Phil. The avian tips over into his side, offering his friend a bite of his cookie, a single hand appearing out of the mountain of blankets he's buried under. When he brings the cookie back into the blanket cocoon, there's a bite taken. "But you can't destroy

yourself with grief. You've pulled me out of some dark places before, Phil. You should know there's no power in trying to force all of this down."

"I know. I just—"

A moment of silence. Phil has a million things he wants to say about the whole situation. He eats a bite of cookie instead.

"I just didn't want to worry you," he repeats, a broken record, his voice painfully small.

To Techno's credit, he doesn't call him out. He only lets out a soft: "*Oh, Phil,*" and tugs the avian in further, hugging him close.

—

It's Peter and Wade's idea in the end. That's never necessarily a good thing, especially when both Matt Murdock and Dr. Strange get involved, but Tony is long past caring. He knows what they're all getting Phil for Christmas.

—

The next day is Christmas Eve.

Phil doesn't expect it when all of the Avengers quickly find out that he'd left his room and come down to scold him. Natasha tells him bottling things up is dumb and then promptly gives him a firm hug, something she's never done before. Bruce says something about The Hulk and having to agree with Natasha. Steve gives Phil an entire lecture on the importance of sharing your feelings — which is cut short when Clint interrupts and tells him to "Give the birdbrain a break." Vision and Wanda feel a bit like chastising parents when they tell him to stop being stupid, but Wanda tugs him up into a huge hug as well.

It's... *nice*.

They're nice. They're kind to him, warm even though he's spent so long shunning them, refusing to participate even as the holidays near. Even now, they accept him into their traditions even though Christmas is the next day, giving him a chance to try all sorts of things. Technoblade introduces him to hot chocolate, which he discovers is probably his favorite part of the whole thing.

Spending the entire day wearing a quilted blanket and Natasha's bright blue slipper-socks is not how Phil planned to spend his day. He also hadn't planned to help Sam and Clint bake about six different types of cake. He *also* hadn't planned on watching the most terrifying movie he's ever seen. The Grinch, apparently, with a man names Jim Carrey who Phil isn't sure if he is a real person or a fucking zombie.

Phil didn't plan on doing anything today. He in fact planned to lock himself in his room and not open it till he was sure Techno wasn't on their floor. But instead, he finds himself eating ridiculous snacks while sitting around a massive tree and watching snow fall from within the warmth of the tower.

That's another thing — while Phil loves the snow and the cold, there's something so wonderful about being *warm* for the winter. Especially when you can still see the glistening beauty from right outside your window. *Especially* when your best friend is half Piglin, and tends to hibernate through the colder months.

Sure, it's comfy to snuggle up into Techno's sleeping form. To braid his hair and chatter to him about everything and nothing. For Phil to call in his crows and have them leave pretty little shiny things for him to weave into the hibernating figure's hair. But, he much prefers the years where Techno doesn't feel the need to go into such a long sleep. Where they can both be cozy in front of a fire, sharing mead, and sleeping only when they want.

Well. This year, there's no fireplace. There's no mead. There are no miles and miles of snow or bitter chill to be warmed by each other's high spirits. But there's hot chocolate, and friends, and central heating — and so who are they to complain?

Of course, Phil is still absolutely wrecked over Kristin. How could he not be? A bit of warmth and chocolate won't scrub away the fact that his ring — now firmly pressed back on his finger — will not see its companion anytime soon. Everything is a little bit colder without her presence.

But he finds that somehow, being able to admit to his grief helps. Techno doesn't judge him in the slightest, but to his surprise, no one else does either. Natasha talks quietly about the people she'd loved — family, and some far more — and lost. Tony says a flippant little thing about his parents, but it's clear that the message behind his words is that he *gets it*. Bruce speaks of his mother. Peter talks about his uncle and parents.

Everyone else seems to have some sort of awful baggage that they carry as well. And, surprisingly, it doesn't make Phil feel as if he's been moping around for no reason. It feels *validating*. To know that his grief is *ok*, and that he's allowed to feel what he does — so long as it doesn't consume him.

All in all, the support he's given is absolutely overwhelming in the best way possible. And, when Phil falls asleep for the night, wrapped up in a nest of blankets in the communal living room, Techno by his side, he feels a little bit less cold.

—

Matt is a catholic, not a pagan. But apparently, he's watched someone conduct an exorcism before and knows something about the roots of catholic traditions in paganism.

Deadpool says that makes Matt a Pagan. Matt says that he's very much not a Pagan, just an Irish Catholic, which is worse, according to him.

Peter and Tony are atheists.

Dr. Strange, though, is very much *not*, (not anymore at least) and is less than happy when they show up at his door and ask for a book on how to summon Death. When Peter explains that a friend named Philza wants to see her, Dr. Strange suddenly goes very pale in the face and ushers them in. Apparently, Death visits the Sanctum Sanctorum occasionally and when

She finishes with Her official business usually takes tea with the Sorcerer Supreme. Because he's got to astral project to even see Her, the making of the astrally-projected tea usually takes a while. During that time, Death talks about some guy named Phil.

Phil's gifts are surprisingly well received.

Peter is so excited by his knife he nearly stabs Tony, who happens to be sitting next to him on the floor. May pipes up about kids not being supposed to have knives, but she shoots Phil a grateful smile a second later. Tony and Bruce both lose their collective shits when they see the amount of netherite-vibranium they've been given. Steve loves the stupidly fluffy socks he's given and puts them on immediately. Matt opens his gift, feels it, stiffens, and hides it behind his back with a hiss to Peter about preserving his identity. But privately, he thanks Phil with a nearly tearful grin.

Natasha is fascinated by the literally killer nail polish and the gold that swims within it. Vision and Wanda act ridiculously lovey-dovey about their own gifts, swooning over them both despite the fact that the amazon gift card was mostly a gag gift.

When Technoblade unwraps his own, sitting on the couch with a cup of coffee in one hand, for a long moment he's utterly silent. He slips his free hand across the vibrant fabric, setting his mug down so he can tease at the plush faux fur lining the hood. The netherite clasp in the middle is traced reverently by gentle claws, the golden embroidery scoured over for several minutes.

Needless to say, the massive hug he gives Phil seconds later is thanks enough.

To his surprise, though, Phil is also given gifts. A handmade ring from Peter which has a circle on the outside that you can flick and spin, with little feathers carved into the sterling silver. Wanda gives him a huge moss green cardigan with holes in the back perfectly fit for his wings. Clint gives him an IOU for a handmade bow and arrow. Sam gives him an IOU in the form of a demand that they race someday.

Natasha gives him special wrist covers that dispel things called black widow's bites, which discharge energy like a trident. Tony gives him and Technoblade these fancy-looking chestplates called bulletproof vests, but he says that they're way prettier than most of his competition, and they both have to agree. Matt gives them both katanas that he allegedly got off of some zombie ninjas he killed, though for his secret identities' sake, Wade is the one who gifts them to him.

It's actually... Really nice. Phil spends the whole time on the floor leaning up against Techno's legs, watching everyone else open their gifts and feeling a joy he hadn't known he was missing well up within him. The snow outside is still coming, but everyone is nice and warm — especially because May gifted everyone ridiculously soft slippers with a cheesy Avengers logo on the front.

The last two gifts, actually, are both for Phil himself. Technoblade's own comes in a small, sparsely wrapped box, a small green bow on the front of it. Phil gently rips the paper away

with his claws, humming lightly at the appearance of what seems to be a jewelry box.

Gold. Beautiful, intricate links, sewn together so thinly they look as if they might break with the smallest of touches. They're a spiderweb of minuscule chains, small pearl pendants hanging from the ends, tiny carved golden Eyes of Ender hanging from the small white circles. When Phil picks it up, a hush goes around the room.

They're perfectly fitted for his wings. He drapes them over his feathers and finds that though they are delicate and beautiful, they are far more sturdy than one might expect — as Technoblade's hands have always been powerful enough to create power from gentleness.

“Oh, *Techno*,” Phil says sharply, brushing a hand against the pearls. They twist and spiral and the eyes beneath them follow his hand as he pulls it away, setting it on his friend's cheek instead. The hybrid leans into his palm with eyes full of self-conscious wonder, waiting for Phil to speak again. “Oh, oh mate it's fucking *brilliant*.”

He closes the distance between them and throws himself into a hug with Techno, wings flapping several times to balance him out as he practically throws himself. They both laugh together, wearing a handmade cloak and a handmade shroud of gold, and things feel just a little bit more ok.

After about a full minute of lovey-dovey hugging and the rest of the group doing much the same, Wade stands up with his hands on his hips, before he points, almost accusatorily, at Peter.

“You! Twinkie little shit!” Peter points at himself innocently while May squawks with clear irritation. “Get your knife and let's go, ok? Time to get this over with.”

What this is, no one but Wade, Tony, Peter, May, and Matt seems to know. Bruce and Steve even turn to Stark and whisper something about the safety of the people in the building right now, to which Tony just mumbles something back and the two promptly shut up.

Peter and Wade and Matt all leave the room together, leaving everyone else to talk amongst themselves. Phil is perfectly content to ignore the weird going-ons and help Natasha paint her left hand, the two of them chatting away about the benefits of netherite on your nails. Techno watches with fierce interest, hugging an absolutely massive stuffed bear that Peter had bought him from a place called IKEA. It has a tiny head and a massive body and he seems to love it.

It's only when Jarvis says something to Tony on his phone and the engineer starts cackling wildly does everyone's attention snap back to the mysterious disappearance of three of the party. When asked what has him so hyped up, all he says is:

“Murdock needs a shower. And Phil— your knife works well.”

He refuses to explain. He does assure them all that everyone except for Wilson is safe, though Wade's safety is usually not very important. At least not to him — so Phil reasons that maybe this is something important. He doesn't really care. He is curious, though, why Peter had to bring his knife and two other people to get the final present of the night.

A few more minutes pass. Then, the elevator doors ding and slide down, and Phil's head snaps around, curiosity leading him to pause where he sits, holding one of Natasha's hands and telling May cool spider facts. There are only two figures in that tiny electrical room, but one of them is far too tall to be Matt *or* Wade, as they stand there, one hand within Peter's, who is beaming wildly.

And then they step from the room, and the light shines upon the other figure, and Phil goes very, very still.

There is long black hair. Wings like holes in the universe itself. When you look away, they seem to swallow everything else you see, beckoning you to look back. A ridiculous flannel shirt with little white Christmas trees on it. Antlers from which hang starlight and the emptiness between those pinpricks of dying light. A smile that holds all that Phil will ever need.

"Kristin?"

Chapter End Notes

Happy Holidays! <3 May you all have wonderful times right now. Stay safe and warm!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Hello :) This chapter is literally. just fluff. there's no sadness at all. like, the ending is a little bittersweet maybe but holy shit ITS SO FUCKING SOFT OK

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a second, Her Angel thinks He must be dreaming.

And then he thinks — *who fucking cares?*

In an instant, Phil is flinging himself across the room, sprinting so quickly that he trips over a bit of wrapping paper and is suddenly falling towards the ground, hands out in front of him, only for his descent to be broken by two strong arms wrapping themselves around his middle and *lifting him*.

“*Phil,*” he hears suddenly, warm lips just beneath his ear, hair brushing across his cheeks, their chests pressed together. Kristin spins in a circle and he cries out in excitement, pressing his hands to her cheeks and then their lips are crashing, landing like falling stars upon the other’s own, and he’s holding her face in his hands and she is soft and warm and she is *there*. The moment she pulls away she’s repeating his name, and there are tears streaming down her face, streaming down his own, too, and they kiss again, and she sets him down so gently it burns, and she leans over so that her own hands can brace against his shoulders.

“Gods,” he sobs out and he’s biting on his lip as their foreheads press together, her own bright brown eyes looking into his. She’s there, she is his, he is hers, they’re *together*, and he feels so incredibly warm. “Gods, you’re *stunning*.”

“Oh— Oh you’re so fucking *sappy*,” she giggles out until a sob breaches her lips again and he’s being lifted into her embrace, hugged like this is the first time they’ve ever met. The tears streaming down her face are both confirmation that she is real and a terrible sight to see, so Phil brings one hand up from their embrace and starts to wipe them away, sniffing himself. But she doesn’t stop crying despite the smile on her face, and she falls to her knees in front of him, the two of them sitting on the floor as they sob together. For each other.

Phil shudders as he wraps himself around her, massive wings guiding themselves to rest around them both. He’s nearly sitting in her lap as he tugs her in tightly, and she cries out, both a laugh and a sob, at the near ridiculousness of the situation.

“I thought— thought you had *gone*,” says Kristin, her voice suddenly so devastated that Phil lets out a warble at the agony that is feeling his love to miserable. “I couldn’t feel you, I searched— searched *so long*, My Angel—”

“I’m here,” he bites out past another sob, hands tangling gently into her hair and pulling her forward till their foreheads are pressed together again, noses brushing against each other’s, the two of them breathing the same air. “I’m here, I’m here,” Phil rambles brokenly, another awful sob-laugh falling from them both at the same time, and he presses another kiss against her lips, and he pulls away, and— “I’m here, you’re here— I’m *here*, Kristin—”

“*Breathe*,” she commands, and for her The Angel *does*—

And for what he thinks must be a century, they lie there, collapsed on the ground, his hands cupping her face and her talons holding his own. Both of their wings have slipped around the other’s like shrouds of the mourning, and yet there is nothing there to grieve at all.

But they have time, for now. And so eventually Phil pulls back, hands sliding down her face and instead holding her wrists, pulling them until they lie in his lap, her palms up and facing him. He traces the lines of black at the tips of her fingers with his eyes, moving slowly down like dark veins of blood until they meet the fair brown of her skin. Once he’s made it to her wrists, drinking in every bit of her hands, how real they are, how warm they are, bringers of Death, he slips his own hands into hers, holding them gently.

Then he unfurls his wings, flapping a few times. And she gasps at the twinkling light hanging off of them, the illustrious gold and dangling pearls.

“This— this is gorgeous,” she murmurs as she takes one of her hands from his and traces a carved golden eye. A small smile quirks her lips upward, and she chuckles. “I bet it was Tech’s work, huh?”

Phil grins as well, turning over to catch his friend’s eyes back where he sits amongst the others. And sure, Techno is there, but Phil is quickly greeted with wide-eyed, slightly awed, slightly terrified looks. His smile falters— but they all look so absolutely awestruck that he can’t help but laugh.

“Ah, yeah, that’s how I felt too when I first met Kristin,” he says warmly, ignoring the scoff he’s given from the woman in question. “Uh— Avengers, meet my wife. Kristin, meet The Avengers.”

“I am *not* an Avenger,” says May in a slightly wobbly voice. “But.” And there’s a brief pause as she drags a hand down her face, looking very flustered. “I am *very* single.”

It takes Kristin a second to get it. But then she laughs, hearty and unoffended, giggling as she bends over with the force of her mirth. When he looks up, she shakes her head, wings ruffled outward behind her.

“I’m sorry to tell you this, but I am *very* happily married. And I do *not* date mortals.”

May pushes her glasses up her nose and brushes the hair out of her face, still blushing a little. But it’s clear it’s all in good fun — so Phil just shoots her a lighthearted glare for her weak attempts at flirting. “Ha, fair enough.” Then— her face screws up. “Hey— wait, what does that make Phil—”

“Phil is my killable little exception!” Kristin responds brightly, tugging one hand away to stab a finger into his nose. He sneezes.

“Oh, you *fucker*; I am *not* a mortal—”

“Aw, little mortal is sad about his incoming death—”

“Ok you two lovebirds,” interrupts Techno suddenly as Phil opens his mouth to start hurling insults at the one he’d had a drunken breakdown over not even two days ago. The hybrid snorts at the way their heads both snap over, and he folds his arms, raising an eyebrow. “Are you guys gonna come over here or harass us with your flirting from a distance all day?”

“You’re still as emotional as ever,” Kristin replies dryly. She starts to stand, pulling Phil up with her, hands just as locked around his as his are to her own. Despite their height difference, they walk in sync, like two swans in tandem until they find their way to the living room and settle on the ground beside Techno.

Kristin turns to him and throws her arms around him in a huge bear hug, the other man chuckling as his head sinks onto her shoulder, his own massive height not quite the same as hers. He pats her back once, then twice, and then moves away, letting Phil take back over again as the two creep back into each other’s personal space.

“Before you all ask,” says Peter as he too sits, now nursing a cup of cocoa and grinning till his cheeks are bright red. “Yeah, we had to kill Wade for this to work.” Then, when a few people start to look very confused; “He’ll be back though! Mr. Dr. Strange showed me how to do this cool Death ritual so I could bring you here, ma’am—”

He’s cut off as Phil lurches forward and throws his arms around the kid in a crushing hug, laughing loudly. Grabbing Peter’s shoulders, he leans back and beams at the boy, an odd mix of happiness and pride filling him — pride in the fact that he has such good friends.

“Those rituals are hard even for the most prolific motherfuckers in my realm!” He crows with joy, watching as Peter’s face flushes and he laughs a little nervously. “Thank you— Gods, Peter I didn’t even know it was *possible*—”

And then Kristin chimes in, bonking her head softly against the side of Phil’s, her antlers not at all in the way as she leans down. “Neither did I. You mortals and your silly little rituals are so *cool*!” she practically gushes, looking at the rest of the Avengers as if looking for agreement. Her smile fades, just a little, when everyone else just looks confused.

“The ritual stuff is *wayyyy* out of our paygrades,” Clint chimes in finally, with a bit of a startled chuckle. Phil breathes out a sigh of relief. Of course, if the Avengers had been anything but courteous to Kristin he would’ve sided with her in an instant. But it’s good to know that she’s being met with awe, not hostility. Clint continues. “I bet half of the fuckers doing them aren’t even really mortal.”

“Language,” Steve says with a roll of his eyes. Clint says something about how Steve never gets mad at Phil for his language, to which Steve just rolls his eyes again. “But uh— *ma’am*, he does have a point. Peter’s the one who figured this all out.”

“I *know*, that was so *cool*, ” says Kristin as she leans forward and clasps Peter’s hands in her own, lips spread in a rosy smile that makes Phil’s heart seize into silence and his lungs collapse just as it always has and always will. “I hope you know that you’re a very talented young man, ok?”

Peter blushes bright pink at her words, his hands slipping back so he can run them through his hair and laugh a little. Phil, who is very used to blushing at his wife, grins.

“You never told us your wife was pretty *and* ridiculously nice, tweety bird.” Phil turns to Tony just in time to see the man snicker out from between his teeth, shaking his head and then letting out a sharp yelp when Pepper swats at his shoulder.

Kristin just laughs. “Ah, your little friends are so *funny*, you two,” she says as she turns to Techno and Phil, both of who are stifling laughs of their own. “I uh— may need introductions, though. There are a lot of you — that’s not usually how this goes.”

“Oh, you’re so *mean*, ” Phil hisses out with a laugh at the accusation. “I’ve got my crows!”

“Not *here*!” She argues back.

“Well here I have *friends*!”

“Hi, I’m Tony stark,” says Tony Stark, reaching out a hand for Kristin to shake.

She beams and takes it within both of her own, nodding. “Yes, I know about you! People used to give you a particularly confusing name. It wasn’t very accurate, was it?”

Tony looks as if she’s just struck him across the face, sitting there with a stunned expression as if Kristin has just reached into his soul and taken a bite. Pepper looks about the same, even as Kristin turns to her and shakes her hand next.

“Uhm— Virginia— I mean— uhm.” She shakes her head, before shooting Kristin an apologetic smile, tilting her head to the side. “Pepper. Pepper Potts. It’s good to meet you. Phil has only had wonderful things to say.”

“More like all the things to say,” says Natasha teasingly as she takes Kristin’s hand next, shaking it firmly, smiling just the same. “Natasha. I’m glad you’re here.”

“I’m just glad to finally meet you,” Clint says beside her, grinning sharply and shaking her hand up and down.

It goes on like that. Answers that make Phil want to tear his hair out and answers that make him laugh, all of them coming from people he never thought would ever meet Kristin. In all fairness — he hadn’t expected to meet her either.

But here she is. Endearing as hell with every word, no matter how foul or how kind. Greeting the people he’s begun to consider his friends, who greet her kindly in turn. Not a single thing about her has changed since he was last fortunate enough to visit her. She is a bit more solid than usual — voidspace doesn’t get to have Christmas trees or couches or whatever else —

but that's not at all a bad thing. Now, Phil can wrap his wings about her back and hold her in a way that feels so much more real than nearly ever before.

And, with the barrier of life and death unwritten for them, he has a chance to show her what she's only ever been able to view from the other side. He starts with showing off all his Christmas gifts, letting the magpie side of him come out as he presents every little shiny thing.

Techno spends nearly twenty minutes at the beginning explaining how the jewelry draped over Phil's wings works. Then, he forces Peter and Wanda to explain the concept behind "personalization on etsy orders" and "handmade crocheted cardigans" to Kristin. She seems absolutely overjoyed at both things, and when Phil lets her try on his spinning ring, she refuses to take it off for a good five minutes, practically obsessed.

At the mention of the zombie ninjas that Matt nicked his katanas off of — called the Hand, for as unintimidating as that is — she seems rather disturbed to know that there are such things as zombies in this universe too. At the sight of Natasha's gifted Widow's bites, though, all worry is eliminated as she inspects the intricate wiring with stunned, excited eyes.

And then suddenly, that reminds Philza that on his own floor, he and Technoblade have *many* old amenities that they've collaborated on destroying and failing to put back together. So that starts a chain reaction. Kristin enters the elevator and promptly needs another explanation about what they are. Jarvis explains, and she gets so startled by Jarvis she nearly shoves her antlers through the roof of the tiny room.

"He is a bit spooky, to be fair," Phil remarks as Techno continues to laugh at his wife, putting on a very fake offended tone. Kristin is laughing too — though being just a bit more conscious of her horns. He plants his hands on his hips and glares at both of them, before breaking and letting out a wheeze of a laugh as well. "Ok, ok, enough — what do you wanna see first?"

She pauses to look around, clearly just taking in her surroundings. Then — a gasp and her wings flutter messily upon her back as she rushes over to the windows, practically smashing her nose against it before her palms land upon the glass.

"Oh, oh this is gorgeous!" She turns to the two of them and points outside, accidentally smacking her entire palm into the window and letting out a pained little hiss. "Is this what you two see every day?"

"Yeah, isn't it fucking insane?" Phil replies as he joins her, one of his wings instinctively coming out and slipping across her back. Then — it's a war, and her wing is on top of his and his are on top of hers until she grabs the base of one of his and starts to scratch at it, and he yelps. "Hey! No fuckin' fair!"

"You two lovebirds are gonna spend all your time flirting, aren't you?" Asks Techno as he carries a broken toaster out and sets it on the kitchen counter.

Phil and Kristin both just flip him off. Then they both laugh. Then they immediately go back to being ridiculously sappy.

Eventually, though Phil excitedly drags her over to Techno's pile of broken machinery. The first thing he shows her is the toaster they collaborated on. It has a coffee pot spout where melted butter comes out — but Vision had put unmelted butter in it once and ruined it.

Neither of them is mad at the android. Their genius is simply too confusing for mortal beings to understand, is what Technoblade has decided. But Kristin seems rather disappointed, so Phil goes and shows her the ice cube machine, cause he thinks they function mostly the same.

“Oh, so it's just— it's *always cold*,” she hisses out, dumping ice cubes out of her palms and into the sink as they start to burn. “Ah! That— that was pain, wasn't it?”

Phil comes closer and takes her hands in his own, gently wrapping them in his own palms, warming them with soft back and forth motions. Then: he nods. “Yep. It's a funny little thing, isn't it?”

“It's *rude*,” she says in an offended tone of voice. “Now I know why you people hate it so much.”

“You people?” Techno scoffs out, crossing his arms and then throwing a chunk of ice at her. She shrieks, smacking it away and right into Phil's face. Then: *he* shrieks, falling down as he trips over another ice cube.

Unfortunately for Technoblade, Kristin catches Phil like he's a damsel in distress, one arm under his back and the other at her side. Even more unfortunately for their friend, they immediately both move in for a kiss, giggling against each other's lips as Technoblade rolls his eyes and goes to put away the blender.

“Wait, you know what you should come and see?” Kristin cocks her head and shakes her head as Phil stares at her, still leaning against her arm, half-collapsed. “The room we share, oh my god, have you ever been hit with a pillow?”

Of course, she hasn't. Technoblade and Phil both know that. So her husband drags her around by one arm as her friend crows with laughter, as he picks up a pillow off the frankly *massive* bed they've taken to sharing and slams it into her back.

“Oh, you're such a *prick!*” She shouts as she stands up on the plush mattress, the burst pillow hanging off one of her antlers and leaking feathers. Technoblade goes pale when Kristin, Death herself, picks up a pillow and —

And *completely misses him*, instead accidentally nailing Philza so hard with the pillow that he plummets to the ground with a screech and a groan when his back cracks. Technoblade wheezes hysterically until he too is attacked, Kristin's declaration of triumph heard throughout the entire floor.

That doesn't last very long, though. Phil gets back up and yanks at the leg of her pants, sending her flailing and tripping down onto the bed. Then he hops back up, standing just above her, and smacks his pillow into her chest. Before he can celebrate, though, a hand lands

on the small of his back and he's shoved downward, Techno dropkicking a pillow right into his face.

This goes on for a slightly embarrassing amount of time — and ends up with Philza sheepishly asking if Jarvis could put in an order for replacement pillows. Half of the ones he's used to sleeping with have ended up on Kristin's antlers or Technoblade's tusks or his own talons or so on and so forth.

But it ends, eventually, when Kristin says with a sudden frown:

“I think I'm *thirsty*. ”

Now— most cafes, restaurants, and diners aren't open on Christmas. But Steve — who occasionally visits the Jewish family of an old friend — knows of one run by an elderly Jewish couple not far away from the tower. Phil knows it isn't the fanciest and most over-the-top date in the universe, but for Kristin, he'll make it special regardless.

First off— she borrows some of Techno's clothes. Unfortunately, he's the only one tall enough and close enough in size for her to try and wear the clothes of. But this doesn't dampen her spirit at all, because he has a few gorgeous dresses stored up from when they went dress shopping.

“First off” gets a detour when she realizes she wants to try on a whole bunch of them. Phil is more than excited to join her, tugging on a few of his own as she tries some on.

It starts with a strapless, floor-length gown that sweeps instead about her ankles, a deep satiny blue decorated with pearls all about the hems and a shimmery, sheer fabric that covers her arms in diamonds.

Then, a winter dress, a desaturated emerald green with long sleeves that wrap tightly to her curves and dance like blades of grass in the air. The neckline traces her jaw, just barely, the collar adorned with rubies and other such stones. The train is so long that she keeps tripping over it, though, and decides against it.

Finally, she chooses the one she wants. An evening gown, a blue so dark it's nearly black. The front is open down to the middle of her sternum, a line of golden stones going from the neckline down to the waist, where it descends like stars, speckling the large skirt of the dress. The sleeves are long, and there's a slit in the middle of them, cinched at her wrists with a golden strand of metal.

She's the most gorgeous thing Phil has ever seen. He tells her that — and she just picks him up, suit and all, and smashes him into a hug.

He himself chooses on a matching shade for his suit and places the golden jewelry Techno had so lovingly crafted for him on his wings. He wears a golden choker and two golden circlets on his wrists, and he braids his hair down his back with thread and wire until it glows.

They decide to walk to the cafe in the end. It's bitterly cold outside as the snow falls down upon them, but somehow, arm in arm, neither Philza nor Kristin are affected. Their wings lie

against each other's backs, as they walk together, hands intertwined and eyes only for themselves. They speak of everything as they wander, often pausing to stare into shops or watch the dazzling lights of some sign nearby. Phil excitedly points out all of the wonderful, fantastic things that Kristin has never been able to experience, no matter how normal they feel to him now.

By the time they enter the cafe, the snow has begun to accumulate on the ground, lingering there, not yet becoming the messy sludge of melted ice. It's beautiful, rather, as their feathers trail through it and it flutters into their hair.

At the front is only one woman — her nametag reading "*Emma*" in a messy bit of chicken scratch. When they enter, she at first looks up to greet them — then startles, clearly confused about why two bird people — one of who is over 7 feet tall — in formal wear are entering her cafe.

"H— hello and welcome in! Uhm— you—" She cuts off. "Are you sure you're in the right place?"

Phil lets out a laugh. "Yeah, yeah, don't worry." He pats Kristin's arm and leans in closer, pulling her up to the counter as she stares around the room in awe. There's no one else in the cafe, so he takes his time ordering, explaining each and every drink to her. From Americanos to Cappuccinos to Lattes to everything in between, she seems utterly enamored by all of the choices.

Then there is the ridiculous amount of pastries. Croissants that small of cinnamon and chocolate. Donuts hot and steaming. Muffins with cream cheese slathered all on top. Things spilling with fruits or dressings or jams, all of the scents mingling together into a miasma of utter joy.

In the end, she asks *him* to pick out their selection. He goes with a hot chocolate, caramel latte, pumpkin muffin, and cheese danish for each of them, which racks up his total to nearly fifty dollars. The woman at the front seems utterly amazed at them, her disbelief growing by the second — but agrees in an instant.

Then Kristin notices a sign on the counter that says "*Unihorse drink*" and becomes unbelievably confused.

Emma laughs, snorting so hard she nearly knocks over the lattes she's started to work on. "Ah— that? Have you ever heard of the unicorn drink? Starbucks?"

Phil, who has at the very least heard of Starbucks, shakes his head. "Oon—ee-corn?"

"Yeah, yeah it was like — this ridiculously sugary bullshit that they made overpriced as hell to get a bunch of money off of. It looks like..." She reaches down to her phone, tapping something in and then turning it around to show them a ridiculous, shimmery, vomit-looking beverage. Phil does have to admit, it's so shiny it's enticing. "This is our knockoff. Unihorse, so we avoid being sued."

Neither Phil nor Kristin know about half of the things she's talking about. They order the drinks anyways.

By the time all of their order is finished a good amount of time has passed. The two of them just sit at the window seats and giggle at the pedestrians outside, all of them seeming very put off by the snow everywhere. It's a lovely color of grey-blue up in the sky, as all the white flakes of frozen water continue to dance about, coloring the entire world the color of ice.

"It's real cold out, isn't it?" Asks Emma as she sits Kristin's cappuccino down. Then— she lies her hand over the Goddess's own warningly. "Careful, ok? That's hot."

"Oh. Oh!" says Kristin in delight as she dips a finger into her drink and yanks it back out, seemingly very intrigued by the sensation of pain. "Oh, that smells so good. Which one is that again, Phil?"

"That's a cappuccino," he replies as he takes a sip of his latte, a shiver going through his as the sharp bitterness of it rushes through his chest. It's wonderful, though, so he lets out a satisfied chirp before he can help it. He looks down at it a moment later, wanting to inspect the foam, and finds that a little design has been spun into the milky white suds.

It's two small doves. They're a little shaken, a little spread out, a little smeared on his upper lip, but they're there regardless, beaks touching in a gentle kiss, wings outspread. When he looks up at Emma, her eyes twinkle with mirth, a bright and kind smile on her lips.

"Look," he says in a hushed whisper as he points the drink at Kristin. "It's us."

She squints at it for a moment. Then, she lets out a gasp, eyes widening with joy. "That's so *cute*! How did she do that— it's like an enchantment, oh, gosh, they're so adorable!"

"That's just plain old milk, hun," Emma chuckles out as she hands down their unihorse drinks. "No magic here."

Kristin seems as though she doesn't believe that in the slightest. She doesn't seem to *care*, though, as her eyes turn to the unihorse drink below her.

Throughout all of their date, Phil can't help but think about how lucky he is. Kristin practically glows with joy, a life to her that could drown out every bit of the Death that she is. It doesn't smother that darkness within her, though. Not when Phil loves that just as much as her light — that hint of danger in her eyes, the deep malice that pulses in her veins. He's not Her Angel for nothing.

She seems so happy about all the things he gets her, too. The unihorse bullshit drink is the most tastelessly sugary thing he's ever had in his life, and it's topped with sprinkles and *cotton candy*, of all things. Kristin seems utterly amazed at the spun sugar confection, and when she accidentally dissolves it in her drink, Emma immediately offers her more.

"I once saw a raccoon doin' that in a meme," she says with a giggle as she spreads the new cotton candy out. "Was just as cute as you two."

Now— Kristin has no idea what a meme is. When Phil gets his phone out to show her the video that Emma is referring to, though, she gets the picture. Then, she gets another picture, and another and another as she demands that Phil shows her all the memes he has. Which is quite a few, actually. Peter and Wade both send him something practically every other day. They keep asking him to get a tick-tock, too, but he has no clue what that is, and Matt gets a dark expression every time it's brought up around him.

She's quite enamored with the memes, but seems to enjoy just being with Phil more. He lets go and is as ridiculously sappy as he's wanted to be for months now. Kissing her after every other drink, holding hands beneath the table, leaning into her warmth and gently running his hands through her hair. He knows they must look like drunken young lovers. He can't bring himself to care.

They still are young lovers, he muses as they leave the cafe hand in hand, the snow kicked up by their departure and Emma left with warm smiles and a generous tip. They walk around hand in hand, not hurrying at all to get back to the tower.

There's a small clearing between a few buildings, just a block or two down from the tower. Phil takes a detour and brings Kristin there, every inch of the normally lush area flooded with snow. When they walk, their heels make deep holes through the undisturbed powdery white, so deep he can stick his hand through it.

Kristin tips her head up and opens her mouth, tongue out and ready to catch the falling snowflakes. While she's distracted, spinning slowly as she waits, Phil slips off to a pile of thick snow, shoving it into his clawed fingers and rounding it out as best as he can. Then:

Poof.

Bright white snow smacks Kristin square in the chest and she shrieks as it falls down her dress, violently cursing Phil out as he cackles at the sight. It's her turn to laugh a moment later when she chucks a snowball right back at him and it gets all up in the back of his suit.

"Oh, ow— ow ow ow— *fuck!*" He screams, trying to get it out.

Through snorts, Kristin points at him with tears of mirth in her eyes. "You—" a hiccup. "You're *dancing*—"

"Yeah? Yeah— *fuck*— and whose fault is that you— *you*—" he cuts off as another bit of snow slides down the back of his neck and into the crevices between his wings, falling down onto the ground and smacking his wings around so hard that the snow around him flies up with it.

This leads to a huge drift of powdery white getting caught in one of his wings and getting *flung* at Kristin.

"Oh *fuck!*"

Now she falls too, as if that'll help anything, kicking the snow around and only leading to her dress getting helplessly soaked. They squawk and giggle together there, absolutely covered in

slowly melting snow, starting to get actually cold now that they're *covered* in the damn stuff.

"Do you and Technoblade d— do this in th— the Arctic? She stutters out, scooting closer to him so that they sit side by side on the ground, conserving body heat.

Phil laughs from where he's sitting, starting to construct two rather small and pitiful snowmen. "Nah. S— s' way too cold out there. This isn't anything like it."

Kristin watches him work silently, staring owlishly. Then, as her curiosity rises: "What's that?"

"Snowmen," he replies as he jams a thumb into the face of one of them, setting a small rock in it for an eye. "They're little— little people you make outta snow. This one is you."

"I have a *much* cooler sense of style." Kristin reaches over and stabs a leaf into the back of the other one. "And this one is you?"

"Y— yup. What's the leaf for?"

"Your stupid capes," she remarks plainly, before letting out a loud laugh when he just flicks it away. "Alright, alright. They're cute. Like— actually really cute. We— we match!"

"That we do, despite your best efforts to murder my snowman," Phil replies as he nestles two little leaves in the back of his own, then hers, a messy mimicry of their wings. Then — he puts sticks behind the head of hers, little antlers, stubby and misshapen. He claps his hands. "Done."

"Do we throw these ones too?"

Phil smacks her lightly in the arm at her teasing tone, but Kristin just giggles at him. A moment later, her wings fold around them, the silent snow shrouded out and forced to land upon the black feathers rather than their heads. Everything is endlessly silent, even the sounds of cars so far away that Phil can hardly hear them.

When he leans up against Kristin, their hands wrap together, hers squeezing his reassuringly. For a blissful few minutes, they just watch their snowmen, little hats of snows growing on top as the powder flutters down between the cracks in Kristin's wings.

"I only have a day here, my dear Angel," she says.

"I know," he replies.

The silence stretches on for a few more minutes. The world is merciful in the time it gives them and cruel in the time it does not.

"I think..." Phil cuts off with a soft breath, turning his head to the side so that it's hidden in her shoulder. He presses a gentle kiss to her clothed collarbone, before he simply rests his head there, eyes shut. Her own head falls gently upon his own, and he knows that her eyes are closed as his own are, the moment shared in darkness. "I think it'll be ok this time, though."

A silence. “I’ll miss you.”

He squeezes her hand. “Gods, my love, I’ll miss you too. More than I’d miss flight without my wings.”

“Don’t say that.”

A soft chuckle. “It’s true.”

“I know. That’s why I don’t like it.”

Phil lifts his head again, taking his hands out of her own, soothing the birdlike sort of warble that Kristin lets out when he cups her cheeks, gently forcing their opened eyes to meet. There are tears in her eyes. Somehow, he finds that he hasn’t cried all of his away, as twin ones settle against his scleras.

“But we’re gonna be alright, ok, Kristin?” He murmurs, before he’s leaning up onto his knees and pressing his forehead to hers. “This isn’t going to be the only time we see each other. I won’t let it be.”

One of her hands settles on top of his. When her eyes flutter shut he can feel her eyelashes, bouncing against his cheeks. He presses a kiss to her lips that is more chaste, softer, than any before.

“I trust you, Phil,” she says in turn, in a hushed whisper of a voice. “I trust you as Death, and you as my Angel.”

He nods against her forehead. “And I trust you as my God, and as my wife.”

For as silly as the comparison is, the two snowmen that they’ve built are just as fleeting as this single day they have together. Just as beautiful and cold and natural, but just as temporary as well. When they leave, Philza snaps a photo with his phone — if to keep the hope that both the snowmen and their love will linger for a lot longer than their lives.

When he awakens the next morning, she is no longer there beside him in his bed. But somehow, he finds that he doesn’t feel cold at all.

Chapter End Notes

i hope u guys enjoyed! i dont usually write romance, so I hope it turned out ok <3 feel free to comment and tell me how I did!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

HELLO GUYS IT ME HAVE A FUNNY LITTLE CHAPTER ALSO FOLLOW MY TWITTER IM SELLING OUT AGAIN I WANNA HIT 1000 FOLLOWERS AND IM ALMOST THERE [HERE IT IS](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Steve Rogers is a bird watcher.

It's just a side hobby, really. Or a side-side hobby, because he primarily does it to fuel his other hobby, which happens to be art. He's made a habit of going to Central Park every Wednesday to find, observe, and draw the birds there. He's even made himself a bit of a collection, of which he is rather fond. Black-capped chickadees, these tiny little fluffy white birds with... Well, a black cap to their head. Red winged blackbirds, which are these gorgeous, skinny little black birds with bright red wings. Kestrels, brown-blue birds spotted with black. Even if Steve doesn't usually color his drawings, he loves to try and capture each unique little bird in graphite.

He's lucky that his relationship with Philza Craft has improved, he thinks. It's not that he's some sort of creep who spends all of his time watching the man's wings, but God, does Steve find them *fascinating*. They're not quite shaped like any of the hundreds of birds' wings he's seen before. They're a bit like a crow's, but iridescent like a raven, but also pockmarked with white, and just—

Well, they're quite honestly breathtaking. Which is why, when Philza asks why he draws so many birds, Steve takes his chance to ask a question of his own.

“Can I draw your wings?”

At first, he's worried it's too intrusive. He still walks a bit lightly around Phil and the subject of his wings. Steve really did feel awful when he freaked the man out. And, in all honesty, he *likes* the offworlders, so hurting them isn't exactly in his best interest.

But Philza honestly seems *excited* at the idea of Steve sketching out his wings. Which in turn gets Steve excited, because not only does this give him a chance to get to know Phil more, it gives him the chance to discover yet another gorgeous type of wings, and perhaps a type that has never been seen before.

Phil was kind enough to let him set up in his own personal art studio, custom-designed just for Steve, perfectly tailored to his rather super needs. One little sketch ends up turning into a full-blown drawing on some canvas and then another one with Phil's wings in another position and then suddenly — a series of several, gorgeous paintings.

Or at least that's what Philza calls them. *Gorgeous*. He trails his fingers across the oil pant, just barely touching it, with his eyes wide open and his mouth ajar. When he turns to Steve, he looks awed.

"I don't think anyone has ever really appreciated my wings like this, mate," he says in a soft voice, rubbing his thumb and forefinger together to clear off the paint. His head tilts, giving him the distinct appearance of an owl, with his wide blue eyes and unbrushed, wild hair like feathers in the wind.

Steve scoffs. "Well, that's a damn shame. Excuse my language. They really are sort of a wonder, huh? I've never seen any other wings like em."

A soft chuckle. "That's cause there aren't, anymore. I'm the last of my own lot, and most people with wings nowadays get em' god-given," Phil explains as if any of that means anything to Steve. But, to be fair, Phil's wife is the Goddess of Death and Steve regularly works with a God of Thunder, so even if he is a catholic, he's an open-minded one.

The subject sounds like a touchy one, though. Steve knows quite a bit about being the "last of his kind." He's not inclined to dig further into whatever sort of tragedy lies in Phil's past, just as Phil will not dig into Steve's.

That's what he really loves about the Avengers — and even their newest acquisitions to the tower too. People don't ask questions nor do they demand answers, even to those things that are unasked. If someone wants to talk about something, they will, and it will be treated with grace and respect and care and solidarity. If someone wants to go to their grave with their secrets? That's fine too. Most people in the tower will encourage you to get therapy if you desire that route, though. Therapy is required for Avengers, anyways.

"Well. Bird wings are... fascinating, to say the least— so I go out and draw them a lot. If you're ever bored, well. You're welcome to come?"

That one single occasion sprouts a routine. Philza makes good on Steve's offer one foggy morning, bags under his eyes and the cup of coffee in his hands shaking, just a little. Steve feels just as rattled by his own mostly sleepless night. So they ignore each other's problems and get dressed up in heavy coats, and they leave, quietly, to go watch the birds.

At first Phil seems a little confused by the whole concept. He doesn't say anything, but Steve watches him raise his eyebrows at every surprised little gasp, hears him chuckle confusedly whenever the super-soldier bends over his sketchbook and frantically begins to scribble.

He does, though, seem to enjoy the excursion. He shows off a few fun little birdcalls that he has memorized and attracts quite a group of birds to their little spot in the park and he seems rather fond of them all, speaking to them as if they can understand him. Actually— Steve wonders if, once or twice, they can. Some of them have a funny little way of actually *hearing him*.

But they're just birds, and Phil just has wings, and Steve is just a bird watcher.

Right?

So they have this niche little ritual together. Sometimes Technoblade will join them, with a gruff snort and a groan at the idea of having to watch something so common as birds. He enjoys it, though. It's clear in the way his eyes light up at the invitation, the way he always strikes up a conversation about the oddly colored birds he finds, going straight to Steve to ask about them.

Technoblade is a bit harder to navigate than Phil. He is utterly familiar, in a way that goes so far as to frighten Steve. In the way he speaks. The way he stands. There are far too many comparisons to be made about Phil being the sardonic, vicious, talented little guy, and Technoblade being the far more violent, far more flighty, and far more *strong* version of him.

That's not to say Phil isn't strong. By *God* — and Steve doesn't swear by God lightly, especially not now that he knows some — Phil is *terrifying*. With every waking moment he stalks his prey, his world, his nest, like a hawk who hasn't quite figured out what it can and cannot eat yet.

But Steve is just a birdwatcher, in this scenario. He just hasn't figured out which bird fascinates him the most.

He catches a conversation.

“--I do wonder, man, if Brian'll end up coming back.”

“Yeah, yeah,” replies Philza's voice, and Steve easily picks up the sound of his feathers ruffling upon his back as he sorts out his wings, a tick he often repeats in the middle of conversation as if he's expecting someone to come up behind him and preen the great appendages. “Me too. Kristin did say somethin' about the murder.”

If Steve was a little bit less used to absolutely insane things, he would be a little bit more concerned about his conversation. Such as it is, though, he is a super-soldier under the employment of a group of crime-fighting super-heroes. He is also a birdwatcher.

A murder of crows is not a rare sight, but it is a rather fascinating one. Many people think of it as a bad omen — Steve instead associates the phenomena with peaking out his bedroom window as the sun went down, a light breeze enough to dispel what looked like *millions* of crows from the rafters of the buildings around him. They'd shriek and shout and even though it was loud and his mom would always be a little put off by them, Steve always thought of them as the orchestrated music of the night.

So no, he's not too worried about the use of the word murder, in context. He is, though, a little confused about *Brian*.

Brian. The name first shows up by Technoblade and Phil's mouths, right up until Tony enters the kitchen and starts making more coffee. It's a simple enough thing, the name. There's no context being it either, though Steve has a suspicion that it's probably a bird. *Hopefully* a bird. He thinks it would be fun if Phil and Techno were one day eligible to join the Avengers, and them being murderers (at least in this world) might make it a bit more difficult.

It is on one lonely night, the day nearly done, the dusk just begun, that Steve Rogers finds out just how dangerous the birds he loves to watch can be.

Now— crows aren't his usual prey. They're beautiful, but once you've had the chance to draw them once, it isn't often that they catch your eye again. He loves the ones with all the colors in the world. Even when he doesn't bring his old worn-down colored pencil set they give him lots of room to have diverse highlights, to imagine up the red breast of a robin or the incredible blue of a bluejay, blending in with the sky.

That's not to say he doesn't like crows. No, in fact, today he's drawn quite a few of them. They've overflowed the park, pecking at the ground beneath him, gathering in the treetops. They're eerily quiet too, nothing like the ones that normally scream and screech all over the place.

Steve walks home alone on the days that Philza doesn't accompany him because he doesn't give a damn. He's Captain America. Anyone stupid enough to attempt to come after him will quickly find out who he is. Or, they'll get their own collars handed to them as they're dragged off to the police station. Muggers aren't Avengers business — but Steve has gotten well acquainted with the better half of the downtown New York PD with how many robberies and petty crimes he has prevented.

The stars are just barely visible on the horizon. The wind is cool, but not so much so that he has to tug his coat back on, and so he drapes it across his arm, joining his shoulder bag. It's full of pencils and small sketchbooks and even a handmade watercolor tin that one of Sam's older therapy patients had made for him as a gift.

There aren't very many souls left in the park right now. Not those that aren't crows, at least, and the occasional squirrel that is scared off by their screaming and flapping of wings. Steve exits without his headphones in as he always does at this time of day. The trees rustle in the breeze, and that is music enough.

The first few roads down give him no trouble. He trips up on a broken sidewalk, he nearly gets hit by a taxi, but these things are normal. Routine. He really should have memorized where that stupid sidewalk is by now, but every day, Steve gets caught up in staring at the sky.

There's a sharp pain in his ankle as it twists into the concrete. He hisses under his breath, hopping forward a step or two to collect himself before he falls. Then, he looks around, trying to make sure no one just saw Captain America get tripped up by messy streets.

He looks to the left. He looks to the right. He looks back to his left—

“Take your wallet out of your bag,” says a soft, gravelly voice, as a point of metal is pressed to the back of Steve's neck and gently twisted into his skin. Immediately a hot bead of blood warms the chilled surface of the metal.

It's like he's been stung by a bee, right where his hairline meets his neck. Not especially painful, but the idea of being stopped on his way home because a mugger decided he looked like a good target is just so incredibly annoying.

“I’m going to give you to the count of ten to put the knife down, sir,” Steve says carefully. A scoff rings out behind him. As his hands rise, the mugger’s blade digs further into his neck. The bee sting feeling intensifies.

Actually, that’s probably an unfair comparison. Steve really likes bees. He always has, even when Bucky’s sisters screamed at the sight of them and when some of the neighborhood boys used to pull their stingers out. He’s got his own little personal garden in his room, right up against those huge sunny blessings he called windows. So perhaps the sting of the knife isn’t what has begun to remind him of those fluffy black and white insects. Perhaps, instead, it is the screams.

See- there’s something fascinating that bees will do when their queen is no longer fit to work. The term for it isn’t anything interesting, but what it is? The culling of the weak? The killing of a queen?

Well Steve thinks he’s witnessing it right now.

Black, iridescent streaks of not-quite-night, the stars gone out, flood the sky. They are silent, same as they were in the park. When Steve turns, he sees that they have landed upon the man. He is not speaking. He is silent. His knife has flown several feet away, where a few crows peck at it, their beaks managing to *dent it*, their unnaturally sharp talons scraping gouges into the metal.

And though each and every crow is completely silent, the night screams with the rustles of their wings. The shaking of many-feathered appendages, the breaking of talons through skin, the soft *whump* of human form hitting the ground. The crows do not rip, tear, cut, or devour. They simply cover the man and then cover each other and then cover something more until that one lonely mugger is gone entirely from Steve’s sight.

And then there’s a slam.

Suddenly he realizes he is not alone. Phil always lands silently. This time, though, he falls, rather than leaps, into the concrete, hat tipped just barely over his eyes. His shoulders are hunched with something animalistic, and there is a crow upon one of his hands, crooning quietly as he hooks a thin talon over it and pets it.

“Fuckin’ idiot,” he murmurs, before staggering over to Steve. He’s dressed in a loose black turtleneck and he’s got a holster around his waist and suddenly, it is obvious that he is out here in the dark on purpose. “Tryna hurt Captain fuckin’ America. You alright, mate?”

Piercing blue eyes without an ounce of humanity soften as Steve meets them with his own. He swallows uneasily. Then, he smiles.

“I’m all good, Craft. You gonna tell me what you’re doing out here?”

There’s a pause. Phil’s heel scuffs back and forth across the concrete, and he whispers something that sounds a bit like *we’re in trouble* to the crow on his arm. His left wing twitches, a few feathers shaken loose. There it is again — that murmur of feathers. Something silent is communicated. Steve is not privy to it.

Suddenly the flock of birds covering the mugger behind him dissipates. He looks over. They're still breathing. They look as if they've only just begun to.

"Phil," Steve repeats in a voice both slightly concerned and stern. "Phil, what are you doing out here?"

"Birdwatching," he murmurs quickly. Then: "Steve-watching. You get into ridiculous amounts of trouble out here, mate."

There's a pause as Steve tries to absorb the information. *He* gets into trouble? It's honestly the most ridiculous thing Phil could've said seeing as he's the one who makes all the trouble

And then Steve has a realization that makes his world *shake*.

Phil is quite a bit smaller, for a moment. With skinny limbs, with short blond hair, without his hat, swimming in an ugly tan pantsuit. Steve stares into his own reflection. Phil stares back. Weariness floods him as he witnesses his own form warp in the puddles beneath him. As Philza becomes a younger, more fragile version of himself. As Steve becomes what he was once faced with—

"-Cap?" Says Philza, with concern in his eyes. One of his hands is on Steve's arm. The illusion cracks. His friend is gone and dead. Steve is ninety-three years old, and he is out of time, and yet here he is, and he's got to get his tongue unstuck from the roof of his mouth.

He reaches out and slugs Philza gently in the shoulder. He remembers when someone else would do that to him. Steve takes a shuddering breath and attempts to collect his collapsing chest.

"We need to talk to Fury about getting you and Technoblade trained up," he says, instead of all the fond words he wishes he could say because Phil is Phil and Steve is Steve and there is nothing more. "So that you can stop birdwatching and do some real good."

Chapter End Notes

if you couldnt tell who it was steve was thinking of. yknow. are you really a marvel fan?/j/lh

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

A big thanks to Bunflower for helping me to brainrot about this chapter :D <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You two are stupid as all hell and I should have you locked up for the things you make SHIELD put up with.”

It’s a fair opener. One that makes Technoblade’s bones rattle beneath his skin, makes the words in his head twist out of his skull and rise like a javelin in his hand. One that has him rising from his seat in an instant, expecting an execution.

But Nick Fury is not so quick to anger, it seems. He rises a singular hand while the other remains behind his back, his one uncovered eyebrow quirked upward in amusement.

“Now, that doesn’t mean I actually *want to do that*.” He lowers his hand, and it thumps softly down onto a large packet of papers beneath him on his desk. “I’ve never been shy about what I do here with the Avengers Initiative. That is to say: We do a little rule breaking.”

It’s been one single day since Steve came into the tower with Phil in tow, tiredly telling Tony that he legally cannot allow the avian to deal out vigilante justice. He turns a blind eye with everyone else because they don’t do it in front of him, but apparently, Technoblade’s friend did not get that unspoken memo.

So put quickly upon Tony’s list of things to deal with was vigilante justice over therapy. Apparently, laws matter more than how crazy you are out here. When they ask Fury why he’s prioritizing therapy at all, he replies that Stark made him. When asked why Stark made him, he simply shrugs and says daddy issues, but in a way that makes Techno think he is downplaying a lot.

And Techno isn’t a huge fan of authority, but somehow he thinks he’s found that he trusts the Avengers and their little family and somehow, somewhere, that became enough.

Plus Phil seems excited to start fightin’ recruits again, so how can he deny his friend that?

It does make him think of back when they were rulers. When The Antarctic Empire was new, and when there were only a handful of people they had to train. Sneeg, Jillian — even Pete, though he was old even when that empire first began. For a moment Technoblade’s heart aches as all they have left behind he is reminded of. But at the same time — his allegiance never was with the empire, nor Jillian, nor Pete, nor Sneeg, nor Wisp or anyone else.

It was always with Phil.

And with Floof. Goddamn, does he miss his dog.

“Now. All SHIELD operatives go through a pretty intensive training process, but you two are special,” says Fury. “We’ve got no real way to confirm you ever actually fought any wars, but we’ve got no proof you didn’t either, and you certainly came out here decked out for one. So we’re gonna do a bit of fast tracking.”

There’s a quiet “*oh, hell yeah,*” from the side. At least one of them is having fun. Techno’s just a little bored — he’s rather be sweeping over-eager peers off their feet by now. They’ve both already gotten a few weird looks from the people here, but he supposes that’s probably cause no one else there has wings or tusks or tails. It doesn’t matter, though. Clint and Steve and Natasha all like them and they’re official SHIELD operatives. *And*, Techno and Phil can both hold their own against those three in a fight.

First thing is that they’re given uniforms. A sleek, skintight black shirt and cargo pants, and a harness crossed over their chests, holding a small baton and a pack of faux suicide pills for which they’re meant to train with. Phil gets special accommodations for his wings. Technoblade gets a hole in his shirt for his tail, though he tends to keep it low at his ankles regardless.

“Oh, man, you look *shredded*, Tech,” says Phil, accompanied only a moment later by a crowing laugh as Techno reacts with a less than pleased expression. “What? Not trying to attract any ladies?”

“You watch out,” he replies right back. “If Kristin sees anyone flirting with you, SHIELD might have a bunch of unexplained disappearances.”

Phil slugs him in the shoulder good-naturedly, chuckling as the hybrid slams into a locker and lets out a loud, fake, wounded noise. “Naw, mate. She’s not jealous. I’m pretty sure she knows I’ve never loved a single person more. “Cept for you— but that’s different. You don’t count the same.”

Scoffing, Techno raises an offended eyebrow. “Oh? Am I not good enough fer ye’, Philza Craft?”

“Not good enough to *marry!*”

They both erupt into fits of laughter, standing there in an empty locker room on a flying ship, miles in the sky, high above the deep blue sea. It’s not quite true— Phil loves Technoblade just as much as he loves Kristin. It’s just different. It always was, always will. And that’s the way it is meant to be, too. For Death needs her Angel and honestly, Technoblade just... isn’t into romance. Sue him.

Then there’s a knock on the door, and a voice behind it, sounding as if they’ve begun to get bored. Fury’s familiar casual anger reappears, while Techno and Phil share a *look*. “SHIELD isn’t gonna pay you to chat!”

Phil mouths: *we’re getting paid?*

Their first day is a lot of touring. Natasha is the one with the privilege of taking new recruits through the halls, apparently. They're grouped up with about seven other people, all wearing identical uniforms, all with the same stoic, proud expression, like soldiers set off for war.

Well, Technoblade and Phil have *been* in war, and find no more pride in going back to it. So they crack a couple of jokes and snicker when Natasha threatens to have them executed and make fun of the cocky new recruits that think they can take a Black Widow down.

Apparently, she isn't even the only one. He thinks that's probably the most impressive part. *Multiple* women trained just as intensively as Natasha Romanoff herself.

"Now— for the last bit of your tour, I want to ask you all a question," says Natasha as they enter the final room. It's a conference space, lined with posh-looking leather chairs and the sort of fluorescent lights up above that make his ears ring. Her arms are folded behind her back, something off about her expression.

To anyone else, there would be absolutely nothing amiss. Natasha has a wonderful poker face — Technoblade knows by watching her play about a thousand games of poker with Clint and never seeing him win a single time. But even the most talented operatives have a tell. A twitch in their eyes, a flaring of their nostrils, their jaw twisting just a little to the left or right. Natasha's is the movement of her tongue and teeth as if removing something from the side of her cheek. It's hardly even a tell at all. It looks incredibly normal. But Technoblade sees it. And Technoblade *knows*.

"Do you like surprises?"

Natasha Romanoff *smiles*.

The lights go off with a dull thunk as if something has been broken. Sure enough, when murmurs erupt across the room and there's the clicking of someone trying to flick the lights on, they don't work at all.

For a moment everyone only stands there like abandoned cattle. Technoblade and Phil, though, have the perhaps-unfair advantage of having a couple of brain cells on their shoulders. So when a moment later someone screams, they are not surprised.

A whirlwind of limbs. A crash as someone falls into a chair. Loud slamming of fists and legs and shoes against skin. A sudden feel of electricity that sends Technoblade's hair up on end — then the sound of lightning, a taser erupting into light and illuminating the cruel grin spread across Clint's pale face as he grips someone by their hair and jams three fingers into a pressure point just below their ear.

There is a blow to Technoblade's knees. It's clear whoever is fighting him knows that he is tall and bulky because he falls down and is still able to stare up into the dim shadowy outline of their face. But he is as prepared as possible, and an instant later he embraces their legs and slams them into the ground, wrestling forward to straddle their waist and land a blow to their nose. There is a crunch.

A cruel peal of laughter sounds out. Philza's voice is not hard to find even with the sounds of fighting around them. All Technoblade hears is glee.

The man below him wriggles to the sound and slams his head into Techno's. He grunts, lurching backward but finds himself braced by a pair of heavy wings as Phil fights just behind him, the sounds of his own fight resounding through the air. Techno grins with the adrenaline of it all and gets to his feet the instant his bearings are regained, blocking a blow to his nose with his elbow.

He twists around and lands a heavy kick on whoever it is that is in front of him. They grunt in pain while he grunts in exertion, a juxtaposition displaying just how much of an upper hand Natasha's tiny tell had been.

Ducking only seconds later, he barrels into the hidden operatives' stomach with his own head, shoving him into the wall behind the both of them and landing a heavy assault. He earns a knee to his gut for his effort, and wheezes as his air is stolen.

Blow for blow. Grunt for grunt. His partner is well-rounded. Technoblade is even more so.

In the end, it isn't unconsciousness or a knockout that ends the fight. No— actually, the lights flicker back on, revealing that only seven people out of their group of thirty have been left awake.

Clint. Natasha. Two people he doesn't know, badly bruised. Technoblade. Phil. *unscathed*. Nick Fury, standing in the doorway and laughing like he hasn't a care in the world.

That's where he thinks it all started. The controversy behind the two of them. Sure, all the other recruits had been a little put off by the fact that two non-humans were working beside them, but Phil and Technoblade are used to that. But then after that fight, it had been revealed that they were there for a *reason*. Not to just sit and look pretty.

And humans really hate what they don't understand. (Or what's better than them.)

Natasha and Clint have no problems of course. Right after the whole surprise ambush, Clint starts raving about how he knew they'd do well and how he felt like he'd just watched his own kids take down Hydra — to which Fury tells him he needs to shut the fuck up and watch what he says.

Natasha herself simply seems as pleasantly pleased by them as she ever is. There are no gratuitous congratulations or celebrations to last a day. There is no war won or award given. But when Phil and Technoblade have coffee with her a few days later she *does* ask what a few of the moves they'd used were called.

Technoblade has always sought Phil's approval and Phil's alone. That is the only soul in their world he has ever cared about. Phil is his life, in many ways, as Technoblade is his. But it does feel nice, to see Natasha so impressed, to watch Clint grow in his respect for them. Perhaps having more people to call friends isn't so bad.

People at SHIELD very decidedly do not want to become friends, though. Not after that whole test Natasha had put everyone through. Apparently, those two surviving recruits had spread word to everyone else that Technoblade and Phil were *animals*. Tearing apart everyone before them, with talons of steel and teeth that ripped through throats like swords.

Apparently passing tests in SHIELD is a bad thing when you do too well. They hadn't done any of those things. But suddenly, they went from being an oddity to being a *threat*.

It starts small, the cruelties. The locker room lights going off long before Techno and Phil are ready to leave. Doors slammed in their face just before they enter a room. When they start to do combat training, their schedules are far more brutal, far more rigid. A single mistake means hundreds of things to make up for it. A single time being late means a million lectures to compensate.

But these are normal hazing things that the two can deal with. They're stupid, sure, but even back in the Antarctic Empire these sorts of things would happen occasionally. Phil or Techno would both usually straighten it out, but even they couldn't fix everything. Some stuff would slip through the cracks. Even so, any cases of actual discrimination were always dealt with, and *severely*.

This isn't the sort of discrimination they can report, though. Technoblade wants this to work out just as much as Phil does. They may not have any allegiance towards the people of this world, but there is fighting in his blood. There is violence in their very marrow, no matter how much they try to hide it. Voices and crows and blood.

So they decide that as they always have, they want to channel these things. That becomes a little harder when it seems like absolutely no one else wants them to.

Steve does, though. Steve, who'd personally recommended them to Fury and the other high-up SHIELD operatives with sway. They count as civilians and apparently that had only made it even *harder* to get them in, but he'd done it. He'd done it for them. For their safety, health, and sanity.

So they brave it through the messiness, thinking nothing of it. It's just hazing. It's normal. It's alright.

And yes, they are tired. And yes, they arrive home every day with bruises, and a little more sore, and with a little less excitement within them. And yes, they see the dirty stares, hear the whispers.

But there is blood in their marrow and violence in their veins and voices in their heads. There's nothing else to do.

Technoblade doesn't think anyone notices much of it when he gets home. Neither of them speaks about it to anyone because they know how high the stakes are, so their only tells are those bruised-fig bags beneath their eyes, and he doesn't know when he *hasn't* had those. It's actually incredibly easy to hide when you're exhausted when you haven't not been since the moment you were *born*.

So things continue. Things are fine. (*Until they are not.*)

Of course, neither of them take any shit. Technoblade is a warlord and a Blood God and Phil is the universe's favorite persistent canker sore, so no, they don't just sit there and take the bullying. They fight back, which only makes it worse. They echo taunts and mimic blows and sneer at the desires of their supervisors, because both of them are far too prideful to roll over and a bunch of humans trying to get them to quit.

But that pride is costly, and comes with all sorts of new issues to deal with. The harassment gets worse. Technoblade watches as a man pretends to retch as they pass, only to spit at his shoes, so close the hybrid has to jump away. Phil is forced onto the ground and into a position to be handcuffed for a demonstration, yet comes home with bruises on his wrists and a sore back where he'd been *stood on*. Technoblade is shoved, bumped into, and punched for his trouble during spars — which most of his opponents pretend is only happening because he's such a big target. That's not a compliment either. People love to respond to both of them that they are so inconspicuous that they'll never make it alive in the field.

One man tells Philza in a voice that is almost polite, almost genuine, that perhaps he should have his wings cut off so he looks a little more normal. Technoblade backhands the man in the face while Phil escapes to vomit into one of the tiny SHIELD bathrooms.

Of course, they both get written up for that and end up being given a long-winded threat by a man who looks as if he's never seen a day of combat in his life. Technoblade, who is fed up, tries to explain what happened. The man only tells him that perhaps the other recruit was correct and that Phil's wings and Techno's tail should have them disqualified from the program entirely.

Where Techno knows there should be rage, he just feels a sense of *shame*.

It's funny. Bruce is the one who points out the decline. He's not someone Techno would have expected to notice. That's not because he thinks Bruce wouldn't notice or wouldn't care — no, the man is quite literally a *genius*. It's just that SHIELD seems so far removed from Bruce Banner, even with the being in his mind. Bruce Banner, with all his fancy educational certificates and his refusal to fight and everything else, who sprouts a conversation that turns into quite a bit more.

“SHIELD always does this, Technoblade.”

He looks up from where his hands have busied themselves. Tangled in a length of yarn, his task of spooling it back up almost completed.

When he goes to Bruce it is often because he needs quiet. Bruce *is* quiet, even when he's speaking. Out of anyone he also understands Techno's desperate need to be alone with his thoughts, not just the screaming in his head.

It's not often they get into any conversations that are too heavy. Deep, sure, but ones about everything and anything that isn't their issues. But here in Bruce's lab, disheveled hair twisted into a bun, done by the scientist's own nimble yet trembling fingers, it seems that things have gone too far.

“Respectfully, Bruce, I’m a soldier—“

“Not here you’re not,” he replies patiently, as his hands dance across his desk to a music unheard. He hums. “Not here, not in this world, probably never will be too.”

Techno considers his friend’s words for a few seconds, his legs pretzling themselves before him. “That’s not... really what I meant. I’m a soldier in the— I dunno, spiritual sense? I can handle challenges.”

“Challenges that leave you with—” Bruce turns and gestures to Technoblade’s throat. There lies a long stripe of purple bruising where his trainer had seen fit to surprise him with headlock training. He’d earned a blow to the head for that. Technoblade had earned a slap and yet another warning. Phil’d not been there for it, but when he’d left his own session, he looked just as pissed as Techno feels. “That?”

“Actually, bruh— funny you’d ask that—”

“Maybe you’re not the best example.” There’s a soft laugh. “Phil, then, huh? How’d you uh — how would you feel if it was Phil comin’ outta there covered in bruises all night? What if it is him, and he’s just not showing you?”

That’s an idea that quickly makes him nauseous. Technoblade is no stranger to the sort of self-hatred that makes him know Phil is worth leagues more than him. Phil is just *good*, in a sort of way he knows he can’t achieve. And maybe some of his ideas of himself are stupid or unreasonable or unfair but honestly? They are his thoughts. Who’s there to critique them?

Us

Us

Us

Stupid

E e e e

Them. Right. Chat. Everything about the past few days has only made them rowdier and rowdier. Every wrong move has been a call for execution. Every time Technoblade accepts his fate is another few minutes of them screaming about how annoyed that makes them. They don’t even have the reasoning to be *mad* on his behalf, just irritated that he’s not killing more people for what they’re doing.

But when the voices say something is wrong, Technoblade is usually inclined to ignore them. When Bruce agrees with the voices, though, that’s *unheard of*. Good people don’t just agree with the violent lake of voices streaming like rivers through his veins.

When they sleep that night, Technoblade finds that no longer is he willing to sit as idly as he has. For as much as his fighting and complaints have done, there is more work ahead of him. If he must carve a space for Phil and himself within SHIELD’s walls, he will.

He's lucky that the main perpetrators of their harassment seem to be constantly around. Waiting for every opportunity to press their buttons, to annoy them, to try and egg on a reaction. And reactions they are given, because Technoblade is a strategist and he knows just how to get away with fighting back.

But this time is different. This time, he's going to end it.

It starts in a locker room, which feels a little cliché. If Clint were there he'd probably make a quip about some movie he's watched. But as it is, the only occupants of the room are Technoblade, Phil, and three unnamed opponents who don't even give them the dignity of glaring.

The voices beg for him to rip them apart. They say with their gnashing teeth to sink his own into their jaws, to rip their bones from their skin and wear them as a crown. Technoblade internally remarks that that would be quite honestly the most dramatic reaction ever, and he begins.

There is a quiet click as he shuts his locker door. No slams, nothing to betray the anger pumping through his heart. Technoblade is not afraid nor anxious. Not of mortal men and humans and those so foolish to expect him to lie down and take their ire.

"I think," he says, in the sort of voice that is the whispering of wind before a clear battlefield, enemies hidden in the hills. "That you all should learn to leave us alone."

For a moment the room is silent. Then— the rustling of Phil's wings as he rearranges his feathers, clearly gearing up for a fight. Just as Natasha's nearly imperceptible ticks cannot always be disguised, neither can Phil's. His wings are just as expressive as his own face, yet he's never learned how to keep them still.

"Actually, to be honest, this isn't a request at all, 'cause if any of you attempt to attack us again, you'll lose. You'll lose *hard*," Technoblade continues with dexterity. He means it. He *knows* it, and he thinks the others must as well, because they stare at him, unblinking and silent. Their eyes are like that of owls in the dim light, the one nearest to him tilting their head to stare.

"You're *really* threatening us?" asks one of them slowly, their name being Jacobs if Technoblade remembers accordingly.

The atmosphere begins to change. He doesn't know if these operatives are going to try and fight Phil and him, or if they're simply so arrogant they can still talk out of their asses, but whatever their intent is, it is ill. It is sickly and rotten and he is suddenly reminded that Steve had told him of how Hydra had once lived in SHIELD's walls.

"Yes," says Philza, with a voice just as rotten, "We are."

That same man who had first spoken advances. His locker shuts with a cartoonish slam, fingers entwined in the leather holster strapped across his chest. As he meanders up to Technoblade like a stalking cat, a smug smile crawls across his face, and it's so preposterous it ruins the image entirely.

“You’ve both got nothing to base that threat on. No one to support you. Nothing to support you, actually,” he drawls out as his tongue unwinds and every bit of malice it seems everyone who hates them has been saving up comes out. It’s not true. Technoblade may be a man filled with all forms of self-hatred and he may have enough trust issues to kill a God, but he knows he has people in his corner. Phil *and* he do — with Steve, Nat, Clint, and even Bruce, even if Bruce isn’t directly involved. He stays silent.

“I think someone should put you in your place,” echoes a woman a few feet away. Her voice is a mere whisper, hidden within her open locker door. While Technoblade’s attention is caught, suddenly—

A fist goes flying out. Jacobs’ arm unravels from behind his back and his fingers curl and he throws his whole weight into the force of a punch—

And Technoblade grabs it in midair. Blood red eyes *freeze*, boring holes through the wall behind his opponent's shoulder. It is clear to every person in the room that when Technoblade squeezes the fist in his hand, he applies very little pressure, and yet, there is a sickening *crunch* as bones break.

Jacobs screams, a high-pitched thing that rattles the room and joins the noise of several locker doors slamming shut. Phil’s wings snap open as he bends his knees and makes to block an attack. It all happens so quickly, the lights going off, the dim glow of the emergency lamps above them, and belatedly, Technoblade realizes he has been set up.

And then another light joins the fray. And then Philza screams. And then, with sickening bile rising in a throat and a cry of alarm, Technoblade realizes that their enemies *still have their tasers*.

The avian drops to the ground in seconds. Gibberish cries spew from his lips as his back arches, wide blue eyes rolling back into his head. He convulses over and over, head thrashing, wings twitching, and then a boot lands on his chest and forces him to still.

Technoblade roars in rage as he dodges the industrial taser coming right toward him. Without thinking he draws a blade from nothingness, swiping at the woman with her boot planted into Phil’s chest. He’s had those tasers used on him before — it’s standard training, apparently, to know how they feel — and he *knows* that even though he himself can take several hits, Phil can hardly handle one.

He’s given no chance to deploy his blade as a blunt object is pressed into his back. He whirls around just enough to avoid a full blast of electricity from the taser, but suddenly, a searing heat is crawling up his side, stretching from just beneath his ribs until it flows into his jaw, his teeth forced together and eyes gone wide.

Their company sees fit to take this moment’s falter to their advantage. He’s tackled. Technoblade manages to kick outward and land a huge blow to someone’s nose, and he hears it crunch, feeling blood spew down his leg as someone rears back and screams in pain. He relishes in the feeling of their pain, listening to the chanting in his head and for once, listening.

Phil has gotten back up. He's twitching wildly, wings limp at his back, but his eyes are filled with fire. Twin thin white arms wrap around someone's neck and yank them backward, a choked gasp falling from their lips as he cuts their air off. His legs wrap about their waist, and they fall backward in an attempt to slam him into the lockers.

Technoblade's distraction is momentary, yet enough. He shouts in pain as the feeling of all his bones being turned inside out returns, this time directly in his neck. This time he too drops to the ground, and someone's boot lands instead on his cheek, shoving him into the dirt and grime covered floor, smearing whatever it is that is there into his skin.

"*Techno!*" Shouts Phil, as the man he's choking beats weakly at his arms. The hybrid in question looks up just in time to see the woman of the group approach from behind. He struggles to speak but his tongue is like lead, and then—

Her hands reach out and dig into Phil's wings. They *yank*.

There's an awful ripping sound. The avian gasps, throwing his head back and accidentally relinquishing his hold on the man in his arms. He falls entirely onto the ground and is kicked onto his side as he is unable to overcome his shock, his fear, his *shame*, blood starting to trickle down his back as the woman cackles.

Techno feels the boot on his cheek lift and then tip his head to the side. His eyes meet Jacob's, and he's about to spit into the idiot's face, when the taser is brought down again, this time right into his cheekbone, and—

He *screams*.

It's like someone has taken a poker, thrust it into the fire, then directly into his face. He thinks from somewhere he hears his friend shout again, but it is cut short, and Techno cannot see, cannot think, past the burning white-hot and the subsequent nothingness boiling through his skin.

"-at finally shut him up!" is the first thing he hears as his senses return in increments. There is a body held over him. There is a woman, standing across from him, and her hands are black, why are they black, and convulsing, twisting in the breeze of the air conditioning, dancing like— like *feathers*.

Phil shouts out some animalistic plea full of pure instinct as the last man in the room scoops a hand into his wing and then begins to cut his feathers out with a blunted knife. With *Technoblade's knife*, which he'd dropped, which he can't feel in his fingers as they twitch, unable to cooperate.

"Yeah, sing you weird — *bird thing*," says the monster with feathers in his hands, blade in the other. Not the most creative insult Technoblade thinks hysterically as he tries to move, tries to get up, but then there is a hand hovering over his mouth and threatening to force it shut.

A good rule of thumb, he thinks, again with a lilt of hysteria, is to not put any body parts near the teeth of any thing that knows it is being sent to slaughter. Technoblade opens his mouth,

wraps his jaw about the long hand in front of him, and bites.

His mouth tastes of blood and dirt. There's a howl. Then— a sob, and it is cut short when someone kicks Phil in the stomach and runs a hand through his hair, yanking his head up. Technoblade tries to form a word to stop them. He earns a swift blow to the head, and he grunts in pain as he is thrown to the side like a sack of flour.

“They really are animals!” Shouts— *shouts someone*, because if there were fifty people right now Technoblade would not know. Another ripping noise. Phil shouts out in pain but he does not beg for his dignity, and somehow, that makes it worse.

Technoblade twists onto his side, long hair falling over his face as he props himself up on his elbow and shakily tries to stand. It only takes a single light press of someone's hand to his skull before he's falling back down, this time onto his back, half-lidded eyes twitching as sporadically as his hands.

Jacobs tsks between his teeth. He's hovering over Technoblade's one of his hands finding its way to sink down into the muscular flesh of his stomach. It presses downward, and Technoblade finds himself trying to move away from it, as he hears a soft *shnk*. The same noise that had accompanied the sound of his own knife coming into existence.

“Last time we had animals like you infiltrating SHIELD,” he whispers, “He took over our minds. Destroyed us. Invaded our *world*. It's a shame that Director Fury thought letting more of you freaks in was a good idea.”

Techno's stomach starts to hurt with the pressure. There is a taser held to his neck. He moves, kicking one of his legs out in a weak attempt to do anything at all, and electricity arcs through him. It's not as bad as the other hits. He thinks that's not a good thing, as he comes back round, black and white dancing in his vision, and bile starts to dribble down the side of his cheek.

“See? Can't even hold back their instincts!” Crows the other man as whatever he's begun to do to Phil is accompanied with a shout of pain that makes Technoblade's head burn. He's occupied himself beside Phil, holding Technoblade's knife to the avian's throat. The woman is threading her hands through his wings. Petting them possessively, tugging out the lighter feathers. Phil groans in pain, blood painting the iridescent black of his wings.

A vicious laugh from the man above him. Technoblade can't feel his fingers. The pressure on his stomach lessens and is suddenly replaced by a sharp, silver object.

“You're a pig, huh? Big, *weird*, pig thing, even though you're supposed to look human,” remarks Jacobs as his hunting knife twists into the soft flesh of Technoblade's stomach, not yet breaking the skin. He tries to suck in his skin but it does nothing but make him press harder. “You should learn your place, *Technoblade*.”

The serrated edge of the knife starts to press inward, drawing back and forth like a saw. It breaks first blood, a sharp pain just at Technoblade's lower abdomen. He groans weakly, head tossing backward, but then there's the buzz of the taser and he forces himself to sit still. He

doesn't know how many of the blasts he can take until he just up and starts to seize, body dancing with cold electric agony.

But then Jacobs starts to messily drag the knife across his gut. Hot pain explodes, and blood of the same temperature trickles down his stomach, into the hem of his slacks, onto the ground. The blade goes back and forth, back and forth, *carving* rather than cutting, and Technoblade's breathing picks up, fast and heavy, and he hears the taser but it isn't for him this time and Phil lets out a garbled shout as the others laugh, and—

The door opens.

There is a shadow burnt into the light of the outdoors. Technoblade can only barely see it as it swims past his vision, languid steps leaving an imprint in the light that sways and fissures. Everyone pauses for a single second as Steve Rogers watches and stares, cold blue eyes shuttered by nothingness that feels cruel and ambiguous at once.

Then in the quiet comes a voice that is burnt into Technoblade's head as it comes attached to the knife currently lying in his stomach as he tries not to move. "Care to join us?"

Crystal blue eyes scan the scene. They go from the knife wedged into Technoblade's skin to the body keeping Phil on the ground to the feathers and blood all about.

And when he smiles, Technoblade feels the bile in his throat turn to fire, and his eyes betray him as he desperately tries not to weep.

"Gladly."

And that's it, really, isn't it? The end of all things. Technoblade does not trust easily and yet he opened his foolish, mismanaged heart, desperately hoping against the odds that he could be friends with someone who did not reciprocate at all. Steve Rogers, who had trained them, taught them, treated them as more than allies or coworkers or burdens. Who had made up for his mistakes for his sins and had become something *better*.

A broken cry falls out of his lips, crackling with the bile and blood in his mouth. It is the sound of someone who has lost all his hope, for if there was any time for Phil and him to finally be killed, it would be now. He shuts his eyes and prays for his own stupidity to be erased in his next life.

There is a metallic thump. A crunch. Twin screams of terror— one cut short and silent. The knife is wrenched from his gut and his eyes snap open with the pain. And, he *sees*.

Steve has the woman from earlier by the shoulder, held above the ground, legs dangling. He slams a fist into her cheek so hard it immediately *deflated*, accompanied by the crack of a broken bone and the scream of someone in agony. His expression is concealed as Technoblade's head shifts back and forth. But his muscles are twined and twisted with *rage*.

"We din't— we—!"

“Shut up,” he says quietly, dark and smooth as the endless night sky. Steve Rogers slams his fist again into her face, and Technoblade realizes that when they had asked him if he wanted to join them they had not asked which side he’d like to join.

There are suddenly a nimble pair of hands pressing down on the wound on his gut. He groans in pain, blackness consuming his vision so that the only confirmation of who is above him is Natasha’s voice.

“Hey, big guy,” she says, her hands being replaced by a tight length of bandages. Techno lets out a half-sob as agony shoots through his stomach, and breathlessly, he asks her to stop. “I know, I know, but you’re safe, we’ve got you.”

“Phil,” he replies shortly, one of his hands landing on hers as he tries to sit up. The world spins and spins and spins and spins and spins and—

“Phil is *fine*, ” she stresses. “Clint has him. Sit down before you—”

Technoblade leans to the side and convulses as he spills all his stomach onto the ground. Natasha is silent as she steps to his other side, her small, gentle, *cool* hand so utterly comfortable upon his feverish brow. He feels the same as he had back in the empire when he’d first become accustomed to the cold, and had come down with some sort of terrible flu for a week.

Phil had been there at his bed the whole time, until he too, had gotten sick, and then Technoblade ended up being the one tending to *him*. That reminds him again, as Natasha starts to tug him off the ground and his shaky legs find their footing—

“Ph— *ill*—”

“Right here, man,” says Steve, his voice like a lifeline. Technoblade’s mind clutches to it—the concept of *help*, and *safety*, and *not betrayal* threading into his head and desperately wrapping around his brain, like a coiled snake. When he looks over, even with his dim and foggy vision, all the movement of trying to walk maybe his stomach hurt more and more, he sees Phil.

His head is hung, eyes barely open. His hair hangs down in front of him, his wings limp and trailing blood onto the ground. He shivers — and upon second thought, it appears to be another convulsing shudder — and Steve pulls him just a little closer, protectively wrapping his arms around him.

“Let— m—” His voice hitches and his head snaps to the side as residual electricity goes through his spine, sharp and *hot* . Technoblade watches his vision tilt, and he thinks about how that’s not a good thing, and then—

“Ok. Ok, we’re treating you two in here,” says Clint as Natasha and the arches help Technoblade as he slips down onto the ground, a bitten-off noise of great pain slipping through his lips.

He doesn't like anesthesia much at all at the best of times. But as Natasha plunges that little needle of local into his stomach, he finds that it's only a relief. Not because the pain dissipates, but because suddenly, Technoblade finds himself able to focus.

His hand crawls out. Phil has been placed beside him, a shock blanket shared between the both of them, and he's slowly sipping water, hands shaking so badly it spills down his chin, his adam's apple twitching as it runs in rivulets downward, collecting in the collar of his uniform.

"Here," says Technoblade, shifting just enough that Natasha still has her vantage point and he can turn to Phil. He cups his hands round the canteen, lifting it, resting his knuckles against the side of the avian's cheek because his hands too, will not stop their ceaseless trembling.

Phil mouths something out, then clears his throat, where a long stripe of brown bruises have begun to appear. Technoblade lets out somewhat of a violent noise, but it trails off into something infinitely more sympathetic a moment later. "Th'nks, mate."

"God," says Steve, one of his hands covering his face. "Gods, you two, I'm so, so sorry. This is— is my fault, really."

It takes a lot to get Steve Rogers to take the lord's name in vain. Phil lets out a raspy noise that was once a chuckle. Techno blinks.

"You din't do— do *this*, C- Cap," says Phil, and slowly, he lists to the side, leaning against Technoblade. Natasha looks up for a single second, and seems to be about to tell him to move. But then — she simply goes back to tying her stitches off, and for that Technoblade is selfishly thankful. Phil's body thrums with a feverish heat, twitching every few seconds. Blood matts itself against the wall where his feathers had been crudely ripped away. But he is *alive*. Alive, and with Techno, and he'll be ok, and that's the best thing he can ask for.

"I was the one who suggested you joined the program."

"And that's why I didn't end up killing someone from the start," Technoblae tells him dryly. Steve and Clint shift, turning to stare at him in confusion. "If we'd been in the program for any other reason 'side a friend, I woulda just— snapped their heads off, or somethin'."

It's clear from Steve's expression that he both believes it and hates the fact. Technoblade almost shys under that cold gaze, but he's far too exhausted, and finds his hands squeezed encouragingly by his friend. But then, Steve speaks:

"That just makes it worse, Technoblde. I didn't want this. You two could've defended yourself— could've done *anything*, and I would've *encouraged it*." His voice trails off, but his message is clear. The three attackers from earlier have already been *escorted* out of the room in handcuffs, but they are proof just enough.

Clint is the one to pipe up next, in that odd voice he gets sometimes, when he's talking about his kids. Soft and kind and far too old for his age, for the age of the men he's speaking to. "You two are far too important to be thrown about by some idiots with egos as big as their — I mean, they didn't have them then, but their bruises, yknow?"

And that sort of stuns Technoblade short, because he'd honestly been under the impression that they were all barely friends, let alone cared for. Is that what friendship is, past Phil?

Phil, the only man he's ever been able to call a friend, let alone an ally, in his entire life. Phil, with his stupid proclivity for danger, with his head resting upon Technoblade's shoulder, wings splayed out behind them and slipped beneath the shock blanket they've been using. Phil. Phil, his world, and the one he'd give his world to.

Is that sort of what the Avengers think about them? That they're *friends*? Never in the way that Technoblade and Phil are friends, certainly, but are they truly so close as to be called a thing such as that?

Phil seems to be having the same internal discussion. Their eyes meet, and within Phil's as well as his own, he thinks there might be hope.

Chapter End Notes

The avengers: I would die for techno and phil without a thought

Phil and Techno: Cringe, what *Crying noises*

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

hey guys! this one was written specifically for the absolute fucking beloved bunflower. there will be another chapter to follow it. if you want to learn about how to get me to write for you, hmu on my [My discord server](#) or my [my twitter](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sky is shining with the sun. It's surprisingly warm, as Phil wanders around downtown Manhattan, hands shoved into the pockets of his sweatshirt. It's one of Tony's, with a stupid-looking band logo, the pockets stained with motor oil from his hands. It's comfy, though, and the engineer had left it on a couch that Phil had happened to pass by as he left.

Nothing much is happening. A weird dog had yapped at him and he'd resisted the urge to punt it. A cat had approached him with much less violence and he'd lost an embarrassingly long amount of time cooing at it and petting it. Long orange hair, soft, if a little matted.

That's where he stands now. In a darkened alleyway, which always bodes well, doesn't it? After the events of the past few weeks, he's certainly a bit warier. But his SHIELD training has been fast-tracked and he's almost done, now. Plus Tony had insisted that Techno and Phil finally get into therapy, so he's bound to have his first session soon.

"What's your name, little guy?" He asks softly as he runs his fingers through the cat's hair. It bumps its head up against his palm, nose concerningly wet as he slips over the veins on his wrist. It's *cold*, too, shivering as it slips beneath Phil's legs and brushes between his knees. "You're *chilly*. Boop." he smacks the side of his wing up against the emaciated little thing and it hisses, but immediately goes back to accepting his repetitive petting.

After a few minutes of standing around like that, Phil makes up his mind. No cats should be sitting around in the cold. Especially not friendly ones which he has currently decided are named Pong. Like Pog, which is slang that none of the Avengers know, but different because if he uses slang when referring to the cat he'll always giggle like an idiot.

He keeps calling it the cat, but honestly? It's his cat now. When Phil goes and scoops it up, it meows, but it does not complain. It wraps its tail about his side and its head bumps into his shoulder, squashed, scarred up nose rough and textured and a little concerningly wet as it rubs his neck.

Somewhere from behind him, he hears a crash.

It sounds as if a dumpster in an alley nearby has been thrown suddenly open, all the bags violently expelled. It becomes clear a moment later that something similar must have

happened, for the stink and stench of rot fills the area.

Phil thinks nothing of it, at first. He shakes his head and hums in mild disgust and looks down at Pong, who makes no noise, and just demands that he pets him even more.

“Earth,” he says in a sullen, dry voice, accompanied by a chuckle that sounds much the same. “Huh?”

But the noise doesn’t stop, and when the screaming begins, Phil realizes it might not just be garbage that he needs to deal with.

There’s a streak of red and blue from above, the thwip of webshooters that immediately have his instincts going haywire — *Peter*. Then, the gravelly growl of a mouth of all teeth, a large black mass behind Phil’s friend, chest crisscrossed with spiderwebs of fluid white patterns.

He’s heard of this thing before. Venom — the sym-bi-ote. SHIELD’s official threat level puts Venom at a four out of ten. Peter, apparently, puts it at a zero. They’re friends, he says, but looking up close at that gelatinous pulsating body — Phil feels inclined to drop Pong down in the soft wet blankets he’d been found in, and run.

“I’ll be back!” he shouts as he wipes his hands down on his jeans, head swiveling once, twice, to check on the cat. Then, with two large warmup flaps of his wings, Phil takes to the sky and follows after his friend.

The wind is strengthened by the presence of something dark, damp, in the air. It’s a bit like blood, mixed with rot and sewage and the fine layer of mold that begins to grow on someone when they pass and have been sitting out for a few days. High above, Philza soars, observing from the sky as he quickly catches up to his friend and the massive monster he apparently calls his friend.

“Stupid thing needs to be punished!”

The words ring out like church bells rather than voice. They shake the air as they roar, and the intensity and anger within them have him immediately diving down, wings giving one last powerful flap until he drops, letting his feathers guide him to the ground.

Or, in this case, just above Venom and Peter. He glides as he listens, the earth-shaking voice of the symbiote ringing through his ears. It reminds him of Technoblade, in a way, when there’s that echo to his voice, broken bloodied tones lying just behind his own and fighting for attention. But there’s a darkness to Technoblade that Phil thinks can be emulated by no one but the man himself.

“Hey!” He shouts abruptly, testing the waters as he flaps his massive wings and starts to keep stride with the symbiote. It barely pays him any attention — other than a noisy grunt and the squelch of its odd skin hitting a rooftop. It, apparently, does not have webshooters. “Hey, get off” a him!”

“Off of who!”

“Whom!” There’s a second voice, far more human, far more exasperated than the first.

“Whom, Venom—”

“Tiny spider is infected by the red one!”

“I know, give the context to the bird guy—”

He’s cut off. Suddenly, there is an arc of light, as red as blood, gelatinous and firey and *sharp* despite the way it seems to be liquidous. Phil swerves to avoid the massive *thing*, but the symbiote is not so lucky. It is latched onto by the chest, and Philza lands on a roof to observe, wings pressed to his back in a flash, stumbling a few steps backward so as to avoid the sudden emergence of a new antagonist.

But as he stands there and watches, he realizes —

It’s not Peter that’s standing there across from him, a few roofs over. It isn’t Peter with that massive spindling and singular spiderweb extending from his chest, twirling and shifting in the sunlight, bloody reflections dancing across the concrete beneath him.

No. Whatever that being is that stands there might have been Peter once. It could even still be him, beneath the pulsating mass of life that wreathes around him, behind the bloodied fangs ripping out of his skull, the way he seems to trap all the sunlight around it and expel it. But that is *not* Peter.

“Get out of here!” Roars Venom, and it is suddenly echoed by the very human voice that seems to live within him.

Phil shakes off his stupor and refuses. “No— what the hell! What the hell *is that?*”

Whatever it is lets out an earsplitting screech. That massive bloodied vine of an arm whips around and latches onto Venom’s side, throwing the hulking beast into the side of the building beside him and through a wall like he weighs *nothing*. Phil hurls himself away in an instant, instincts alone taking over and helping him to just barely miss being snagged round the waist and thrown all the same.

No response. There is a loud clatter. Screaming, both human and not. A loud squelch. Something wet being broken by something hard, heavy, enough to break through concrete. Venom and its human do not respond.

“...Peter?” Phil takes a few nervous steps forward, hands gripping the edges of his sweatshirt’s pockets. His wings are risen upon his back, his hair on end. There’s an energy in the air. It is one of the same as that of what he had witnessed. That of *Carnage*.

But he is only introduced to silence, so he takes a few more hesitant steps, till he’s hung over the edge of the building and looking down. What he sees does nothing to rise that tide of anxiety within him — the fear in his gut that screams that somewhere, there is a predator. For below lies a man, and only a man, with a large amount of rebar driven through his chest, and no symbiote to be found.

“What in the name of the *End*, ” hisses Phil between his teeth as he reels backward. That man had been *alive*. Bleeding profusely, panting, eyes glazed over — yet *alive*, mouth open and eyes wide with agony. Had that been the voice behind the symbiote? The man behind Venom? Are they truly that *fragile*?

He’s about to leap down and help him when suddenly, from below—

“*Don’t!*” It’s strangled and pained and he doesn’t see the man say it, but it’s there, clear as day.

Phil stares down at him in disbelief, finally noticing the black sludge crawling around the rebar lodged in his stomach. It looks as if it has begun to sew together the damage, ripping apart old skin and rewriting it while the human lets out a broken groan. Phil’s chest siezes in disgust and anxiety at the sight, his desire to run from the incoming threat warring with his need to go down and help.

“I’m not just fuckin’ leavin’ you here—”

“Jus’ *go!*” he shouts, waving a hand, clearly regretting it a moment later when he has to go silent for an extended amount of time. Blood trickles down from his lips. He stiffens, gagging on it— “Call— call someone, call the Avengers, just go, go, run— fucking *run!*”

Before the man can finish, he slumps down and off of the piece of rebar, a garish black tendril extending up and out of his chest to pluck it from between his ribs as if it is nothing. Wicked, razor-sharp teeth ripple and extrude from his skin as the thing within him — within him? Is that even the right word for it? *Infecting him?* — does it’s *work* beneath.

He does not listen. Of course, he doesn’t. In hindsight, perhaps he should’ve recognized that not all aliens are as easy to beat as Technoblade is on a bad day. In hindsight, perhaps he should’ve picked up that cat and run the moment he heard trouble. But Philza Craft has never lived his life worrying about hindsight. And so, accordingly, he jumps right down.

Slow footsteps. Philza circles the corpselike body, observing the slow rise of his chest, the way his eyelids flicker open every so often, the ripple of black veins beneath blue-tinted skin. One of his hands creeps into his pocket, folding around his cell phone. He pulls it out and starts to search for Techno’s familiar, comforting voice, when suddenly, he hears someone else.

“*Phil?*”

It’s quiet. Broken. Watery. Followed by a *sob*, dropping from none other than the lips of a child. He whips around in an instant to see Peter at the end of the alleyway, eyes wide and so bloodshot his bright blue scleras are nowhere to be found. He’s bleeding from a head wound and clutching one of his arms, knees knocked together as he slumps over against a wall.

Phil is rushing forward, his phone clattering to the ground before he can think. Peter collapses.

“Oh fuck,” he gasps out as his arms close around Phil’s cheeks, the boy’s skin so pale and frozen it’s as if he’s spent hours alone in the arctic. Phil’s knees protest as he drops to the ground, brushing sweat-soaked locks away from his friend’s face, desperately feeling for a pulse around his neck. “Oh, *fuck*,” he repeats, this time with far more urgency — for there is a pulse, but it is thready and weak and Peter moans within his arms.

He is quick to gather the younger boy into a sufficient carry, hoisting him up until his bleeding head is cradled against Phil’s chest, his breathing gently disturbing the hair draped across the avian’s shoulders. “You just hold on, Pete, ok?” He demands to an unconscious form, to someone who can’t hear, and perhaps it’s a bit of a plea to his wife, too, for Phil rarely asks her for anything, but Gods, this is *Peter*.

Peter. So young, so fragile, headstrong and protective and one of the first people in this world to ever wholeheartedly support Phil and Technoblade no matter what they seemed to be. Peter, who found Phil soaked and panicked in an ally and took him in. Peter, who is all smiles and laughter and witty comments and rolling his eyes when anyone offers him anything more than a bandaid.

Peter, whose eyes snap open and whose skin flushes with an inhuman heat. Peter, who chokes out a single word and begins to seize so aggressively that Phil drops him, cursing, trembling as he takes a single step backward, for that single word that was uttered, enough to make Peter himself as terrified as he is:

Is “*Run*.”

But even as Phil’s instincts start to scream at him to listen, he knows he won’t. Peter is his friend, and perhaps it is not in the same way or to the same magnitude as he is with Technoblade, but he is still *important*. Phil still loves him, still cares for him, and so when Peter stands, and a cloying red liquid starts to physically climb up his arms, Phil stands his ground.

(Philza does not think of hindsight. Perhaps this one time he will come to regret that.)

He drops Peter. Not on purpose, no, but he suddenly has gained insurmountable weight, both physically and in Phil’s mind, dropping like a sack of stones to the ground with a wet thud. He cries out, but it is garbled, and he’s dragged up by wicked red tendrils only a moment later. Phil stumbles a single step backward in his horror, then another, until his wings are flapping and he’s made it into the skies.

It is then that he realizes he dropped his phone on the ground, and not-Peter has begun to advance with a growl. Not-Peter, with web-shooters and huge red extendable arms and legs in addition to a growing teenage boy’s four arms and legs put together.

“Peter!” He shouts and flies up another few yards to avoid a massive red *thing* that sharpens to a point and makes an arc like a knife right at his sternum. Whatever this symbiote is, it clearly is not the same as Venom, and it occurs to him suddenly that *this is what he has been training for*.

His phone is gone. Any form of communicative device of his own is back at home other than his phone and his phone is *gone*, blocked by not-Peter, whose face is half-concealed as the godless regurgitation on his skin slithers and warps and exposes tear-filled eyes.

The only thing he remembers from the brief introduction to Venom that Peter had not given — Tony had wanted him and Technoblade to have a bit less biased perception of a volatile killing machine — is that they're susceptible to fire and sound-based attacks.

This is downtown Manhattan. An attack from a symbiote isn't likely to go undiscovered for long, and there's got to be a gas main around here *somewhere*.

He dives back down and narrowly misses another arcing arm that splits, slashing through concrete as if its butter. Someone screams — pedestrians have begun to get involved. *Fuck*. From out of nothing appears his sword, shining netherite knocking away a long chain of toothed flesh. The thing screams with a voice that is both Peter's and not, and it falls back, giving him a chance to land and to search.

Stumbling forward with massive strides, he dives into some random building — one of those “bodegas,” he thinks, the bell on the door screaming at his arrival.

“Where is the nearest gas main?” He inquires to a stunned looking young man holding a cat. He realizes suddenly there is grime smeared all across his face and he's covered in blood and sweat. “Ah, mate, just pretend I'm an Avenger and show me where yer fuckin' gas main is!”

The man does a double take and then suddenly starts to type something into his phone. *911*. Phil is about to start screaming at the man about how they're all going to die when suddenly, that one scream from before multiplies. Car alarms start to go off as a roar shakes the ground from several streets over. The man curses loudly and fumbles with his phone, dropping it, and, to Phil's horror, smashing it irreparably as it hits a counter corner.

“You fuckin' numbnuts!”

“You just— just came in my store hollering about gas mains!” Defends the idiot with the cat, who then proceeds to drop said cat and gasp when it goes running. “God damnit— look what you *did*.”

This is when Phil decides he's had enough and leans over the counter, grabbing the attendant's collar and physically pulling him up until he's dangling a few inches off the ground. His wings mantle at his back and then expand, cold air blown forward as menacing black feathers shiver and shake.

“Listen *here*. If I don't find a gas main to explode and make a fire with then a gigantic monster is going to come in here, pick you up, and *eat you and your cat*.” The man pales, Phil sneers. “I have Tony Stark on speeddial. I'll pay for your store to get rebuilt and made *better*.”

That's how he ends up being dragged down into a bodega basement, anxiety gradually growing as he hears screaming from outside. The media has surely caught on to what's

happening at this point, too, which doesn't bode well — but maybe, since Phil has no access to any cellular devices, it'll be ok.

But the amount of shouting outside is really concerning. It's not just panicked — some of it is *pained*, as not-Peter goes on a veritable rampage. Phil takes one last look up the open door above him, then back down to the man below, tears in his eyes, cat in his arms, and rushes down to clutch his shoulders, forcing them to be eye to eye.

"I know this is scary. I don't want you to have to do this, but I *promise*, I promise that you're not going to get hurt." He jostles him just enough that the man blinks, nodding owlishly, sweat coursing down his face. "The moment you lay this down, I want you to run as fast as possible up the stairs."

He hands the shop owner a stick of wrapped dynamite. Or something as close as possible, procured from Tony's lab after he'd been allowed a few hours to fiddle with mechanics, and Jarvis had said that the thing wasn't dangerous enough that Phil couldn't keep it on him.

"But the most important part is that you've gotta run away, ok? And get— get other people to run, yeah?" Phil knows he's heading into half of a suicide mission, but if he does this right, neither him nor Peter will get too hurt at all.

"Wh— What is it?" Asks the man in a shaken voice. "I don't—"

"It's an explosive, mate," he replies, though that just seems to scare the guy more. He shakes his shoulders another time. "It's only going to blow when it's supposed to, ok! Just— Just run, and I'm gonna be the one settin' the fucker off, ok?" He creases his brow, leaning in so closely that in the dim light, he can watch as fearful tears collect on the man's paling skin. "If I don't do this, a lot more people are gonna get hurt. So just lie it down, and then fucking *run*."

Without allowing another response to be given, Phil thrusts the explosive into the man's hand and races back up the stairs.

It's quick to see how badly the streets around him have been decimated within the five minutes he's been below. The netherite in his hands suddenly weighs a hundred tons more when he realizes just how many lives it could save here — or how many his inaction could take.

"Get the *fuck outta the streets!*" He shouts as he races out of the bodega, wings boosting him forward and catching one of not-Peter's tendrilling limbs with his sword.

It screams in agony and thrusts an arm through a building, grabbing a massive chunk of concrete and hurling it directly at Phil. "*STUPID WINGED THING!*" It says, and it *shatters* the air with its violent screech, repeating it as Phil dodges the airborne weapon with ease.

"Oh, *I'm* the stupid one?" He shoves off of a large, snapped in half fire hydrant and launches himself up to eye-height with the symbiote. "Come and get me then!"

The moment one of the tendrils whips out Phil dives back down, leading him backwards towards the bodega. There's no sight of the man who worked there yet, so he keeps himself high in the air, twisting around the slice through an extension of Peter's arm. The symbiote screams — and then—

It happens quickly.

There's a woman who stumbles and trips as the symbiote rushes forward. Phil notices her before he notices the track for the symbiote's arm. It swings, wide, large, right towards her, and he dives down, latching onto one of her arms and throwing her and hoping a concussion from hitting the ground is better than her entire body being torn open and apart and eaten and —

White, hot —

Something— something *burning* lances through his back—

He lets out a strangled scream as something digs into his skin, then rips itself *out*, and his flesh is flayed, strands of it torn away as well—

He realizes belatedly that *he* is screaming. That no one else is left on the street, all of the rest of the people rushing away, but there are phones on him, broadcasting him as his knees buckle and a whole layer of skin gives way across his back. The scream continues as the not-Peter advances, but suddenly, and without warning, he hears a scream that is not his own yet all too frighteningly familiar.

The symbiote's rippling red chest is being torn, thin, shaking white hands soaked in their own blood and the blood of others having begun to *rip* through it. For a split second behind the awful sickness of the monster Phil sees *Peter*, covered in blood and pale and tears streaming down his face. And, suddenly—

“Ph— hn *nhg*— Phil! *Go!*”

He doesn't need to be told twice.

Past the burning in his back, Phil staggers towards back to the bodega, ragged breathing reverberating through his own ears as he listens to Peter's screams slowly start to mingle with that of the symbiote's once again.

Everything is shaking, burning, the feeling of white hot agony in his back giving way to a slow ache, an itch that has him whining into his hands, starting to stumble through the doors of the corner store, not even noticing that the glass is gone. The place has been crushed and smashed in several places where massive chunks of debris have falling through it, but Phil pays them no mind. He hardly can.

“Ff— fu *ck*—” he gasps out as he makes it to the stairs, flinging them open. The hot wind from below surprises him, and Phil staggers backward on shaking legs, feeling the cool blood dripping down his hips and legs and wings contrasting the heat. He groans past the agony that is walking, though his sword clatters to the ground, hands shaking too badly to clutch it.

When he lifts his palms to wipe sweat off his forehead, they're soaked in red. "Need— Need to—"

And there, in the basement, soaked in sweat and blood and not remembering having come down the stairs at all, Phil sees it. A flash of the gaudy red he'd painted his explosive device, hastily clipped up against a loop of metal holding a pipe to a wall. The time isn't set. There is no redstone. Not that he has any time to set any down — Phil can hear less and less of Peter by the second, and the screams are growing far closer.

Philza refuses to die here, alone in rubble and soot. His shaking hands slam into the pipes, just barely managing to reach them as he falls to his knees. A low moan breaches his lips, his vision fading to black for a single second before another awful crash from outside startles him back to consciousness.

"*Gods,*" he mutters, as Philza Craft finds himself beginning to pray, pressing a haphazard kiss to the ring upon his left hand. "Gods, let me come out of this alive."

And he gets to work.

Rigging an explosive is easy. It's like riding a horse — once you've done it once, you'll never be able to do it wrong again. But his hands are slippery with his own blood and sweat, and so he leans down, pressing them into the dusty floors until a thin layer of debris lies against them, and he perseveres. It takes longer than he likes, his work, but everything is pulsing with pain and he doesn't have any option other than to take it slow if he doesn't want to die.

The moment the final buttons have been pressed, Philza runs.

It's good timing, too. The symbiote is far too close for comfort as Phil makes a mad dash up the stairs, listening to its victorious cackling. It seems that all of the time Peter had given him is up.

But now, he doesn't need time. He actually needs the symbiote to get closer, he thinks hysterically, as he suddenly lets out an earsplitting holler at the damned thing, unable to raise his arms to frantically wave at it, every movement sending him into fresh waves of agony.

"*G'd'over here!*" He shouts, hopping from one leg to the other before he's forced to start sprinting backward again. *Thirty more seconds.*

"*LET ME EAT YOU!*" Screams not-Peter, as if Phil is an idiot and going to let himself be eaten and— and oh *Gods*, he prays under his breath, oh *gods*—

It's so close now, so close he feels that he can almost feel the awful heat of its breath between the jagged white teeth in its skull. They look as if they've been stuck there by some unholy hand — *ten seconds* — stolen off all the other creatures it has eaten.

The final stretch. Phil can pinpoint exactly where the explosive is as he stands in the rubble of the bodega. The symbiote is standing *so* close, and Phil dares to try and take a few steps back, tries to spare himself some of the explosion, but it's no use, and all he can do is pray.

“Please,” he begs. Philza does not want to die. For Technoblade. For Peter. For Steve. For Natasha, and Tony, and Matt, and every single other new person he’s met. He’s got so many reasons to want to live, and here he is — *five seconds* — standing directly over a bomb of his own creation. *“Please let me live.”*

The world falls apart.

The void opens up enough for a bit of pure silence itself to leak into the world. Philza finds himself suspended without the use of his wings. All the universe screams, but she is silent, still, even as the world beneath his feet is destroyed and torn apart by cruel teeth of his own design.

He’s floating, he thinks. For a moment he remembers what it was like when he met her. The Universe, that is. When he’d interrupted her, stepped forward, and begun to wonder what he had done wrong, and who he was, and what he was. That’s how pure the silence was. How gentle the nothingness.

It had been peaceful.

Only a few seconds later do the explosion noises start to register.

Philza finds that he’s been thrown against a building some several yards away. His wings are twisted, torn, wide holes broken through them, so irreparably shredded. They are warped as the branches of a tree in fall, bare of wings and brittle enough that the wind could break them. He cannot yet feel grief over the pure agony that is every inch of his skin. He finds, quite suddenly, that neither can he feel his arms, nor his legs, nor his back, and he cannot turn his head, and—

And yet, cruelly, he can still scream. Scream, and scream, and scream, as he starts to register that there is a large hole through his chest. That a long red bit of that symbiote’s form has taken root within his skin, hung just above his ribs, and he cannot yet tell whether it is within his heart or not. He is as a butterfly is pinned, and though he cannot move anything at all other than his mouth, he can feel every inch of his body as it begins to fail.

But, as another explosion rips through the sky, as dry and cracked lips are covered in blood, as Philza Craft is torn apart, all he wonders is if Technoblade will be proud.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not totally evil. Phil isn't dead, I promise./gen

:D

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I finally get to do the stereotypical fanfic author thing and say SORRY I WAS DYING!!! The reason this shit took me so long was because my body was slowly falling apart because of an undiagnosed chronic illness <3 But I am here now! Is this my best work ever? No. I would argue I am a little bit rusty. But good god I am trying my best for you all, I promise! I absolutely will be updating this fic again with the final part of this specific arc as soon as I can.

Thank you for all of your continued support even with me being so flakey!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Technoblade doesn't often pay attention to the news. There's no real reason for him too, save for when it genuinely involves him — or occasionally, the Avengers. This world is so hateful, and said hate is so widespread, he really doesn't see the point. Especially when he might not even be here forever. He doesn't even know what most of it means. So, when he sees it anywhere in the tower, he tends to see no reason to watch it.

But that doesn't mean he doesn't catch bits and pieces of stray context, his brain filtering out the rabble and finding little things to force him to latch on to. Such as now — entering the tower, bags of groceries looped over his forearms, humming quietly as he passes through the crowds of people in the foyer. The... *crowds*.

It's then that Technoblade realizes the front lobby to Avengers tower is *packed* with people. People who work there and also seemingly people who have wandered off from the street as well, all looking sufficiently horrified by whatever it is they've been drawn together by. Honestly, he doesn't *want* to care. The crowding is so thick, though, that he's forced to come to a stop somewhere near the welcome desk.

There are two large tv screens that hang over the welcome desk. From day to day, the material flashing upon them changes. Sometimes Technoblade will pass by information about the Avengers or Stark industries on repeat. Sometimes, there'll be a trivia game playing. Sometimes, when Tony is bored, it'll be a video game that he's playing elsewhere in the tower. Sometimes, Jarvis will play footage of their little superhero boyband being particularly domestic.

Today, though, someone has switched the screens to display the news — something he knows for sure he's never seen on them before. They've got an aerial view of an explosion sight, panning over what must be a few city blocks of damage. Cars smashed beneath tonnes of bricks, homes collapsing inward like broken ribs, pipes jutting up from the ground, spewing

sewage and water and steam through the already hazy air. In the middle, though, is the clear origin of the carnage.

A massive crater lies where what must've been a large building had sat. The innards of the place are curled outward as if bent, not broken, by the force of the explosion. No one seems to be there within the clutches of the explosion radius. At least not at first glance, as Technoblade takes a hesitant step closer, observing what can't be seen from afar.

The helicopter's camera starts to zoom in. They're saying something about injuries, about Spiderman, about casualties — but Technoblade can't focus on anything but the image on the screen, as a stark, technicolor nightmare is displayed in perfect clarity for him to watch.

There, lying propped up against a pipe that is jutting right through his sternum, is Phil.

Phil, with thick, syrupy blood sliding down his mouth and neck, white teeth stained red. Phil, head tossed back as a silent scream emanates from his lips, with his wings twisted into hopeless jagged messes behind him, the white of bone seen between the black of feathers. Phil, with his fingers scraping against the ground, white and thick with dust. Phil. Phil. *Phil.*

Technoblade is running before he even recognizes that not all of the red spreading from his friend is blood.

The elevator doors are already opened. He must have dropped his bags, because his arms are empty as he throws himself inside, a rattling, bone-deep breath clawing at his chest as he finds himself unable to breathe. Blood fills his lungs, his chest, his throat, his mouth — as he claws at the buttons on the elevator panel, his hand dragging across several as he trusts Jarvis to take him where he needs to go.

There is no one else in the elevator. There's an echo of something he might've said to the people within it a moment ago — a snarl, a shout, something that got them all to get the *hell* out. Something that echoed with a thousand other shattered voices, as his blood — as *their* blood — begins to thrum. As they whisper, and as they speak, and as they begin, quite quickly, to *scream*.

“The Avengers have already begun to assemble.” The voice comes quietly and with a soft ding. Technoblade's ears swivel to the input of noise. Jarvis. Something other than his own head — and he clings to it, as they start to tell him what must be done, as they start to *demand*— “Mr. Stark has requested that you come with them.”

The words take a moment for Technoblade to process. He leans his arm up against the wall and presses his cheek to the cold metal, heavy breath fogging it up as he stares straight forward, vision shaking with how little control he has over it.

“He can't— can't *stop me* from *goin'*,” he spits out, in a voice that *shakes* the elevator, that *twangs* against his bones and pulls his skin taut and is not his own. “*I'm going to get my friend—*”

“I would not allow him to stop you, Master Technoblade,” comes a firm, steady, grounding response. He swallows down a mouthful of blood and nods against the cool metal of the door.

Technoblade thrusts himself upward off the wall and stands, finding that his hand has already found the hilt of his sword.

His thumb brushes longingly against the engraved, enchanted metal of his blade. He remembers every second of forging the weapon. He can hear the soft *shing* as the metal slides into the thick pad of his finger, blood bubbling up as it moves up and out, leaving a thin trail of red upon his skin. He remembers it just as he remembers every weapon he has ever forged, he can remember every death it has brought upon him. Every war it has won, every life it has taken, every kingdom slain. Technoblade knows exactly when it was used to harm and when it was used to protect.

The doors of the elevator open. His hand tightens on the hilt. The air is cut in half as he raises his arm, his sword sheathed though far from disarmed. There stands Steve, with his helmet hanging from one hand, which happens to be shaking, knuckles white against the fabric. For the first time since Technoblade has met him, Captain America looks *afraid*.

He brushes past his friend and looks for Stark. They won't save Philza with fear. They will save him with *death*.

—

The flight is quiet.

Steve, Tony, Natasha, Clint, and Technoblade have come. Jarvis reports that Daredevil has left Hell's Kitchen and been spotted carrying an unconscious Spiderman from the scene. He also reports that what was once Philza is now a mass of inorganic tissue and unidentified symbiotic material that has begun to *fly*.

"Venom. Where's Venom?" Asks Natasha, scrolling through the screen of a computer while Technoblade stills his beating heart long enough to focus on her words rather than the slaughter curled around his sternum and waiting to burst forth. Nimble fingers pull up the news feed. There's the sound of Philza and something that is not Philza screaming at once before she mutes it. Her hands do not shake. Technoblade's do. "Or Brock—"

"Eddie Brock is currently being transported to the nearest hospital in the back of an ambulance, Ms. Romanoff," says Jarvis in return, and she sucks in a deep breath, reeling back from the keyboard. From behind her, Tony curses.

"Jay? Get someone on the scene to interview Brock the second he's out of treatment." He flicks a holographic screen projected up from his wrist, and a selection of information on the man appears, followed by a brief overview of his symbiote partner. "I want to know what the fuck happened here and how Craft got mixed up with it."

"Shall I call May Parker?"

"Oh *Christ*— Yes, yes! For God's sake, get her updated, have someone tell her what's going on—"

He's cut off by Clint reaching over and placing a hand on the metallic arm of his suit. His steely grey eyes have, oddly enough, a quiet kindness to them as Stark pauses, tongue darting out to wet his lips.

"Let me call her," he says with a nod, and Technoblade thinks back to try and find another time when he's seen Clint act so grave, and he *fails*. "The kid'll be ok, Tony. Trust red to get him out of there."

"Oh, yeah, yeah— trust the fucking— the *blind man*—" Tony rips his arm away, the hologram suspended above his wrist and the hollow blue glow displayed across his face going with it. He looks *sunken*. Eyes red, jaw twisted as teeth grind, his lips bitten and bloody. There is *pain* knotted in his brow, as he jerks himself away from them and turns to monitor the news on the holographic video displayed beside him. Immediately, it switches to a bird's-eye view of Daredevil as he sprints through the streets, a bundle within his arms and small enough that the blanket wrapped around it dangles and hits the ground with every leap.

Clint turns toward Steve with anger in his eyes. It's clear that he intends to say something snide in response. It's clear that Steve is going to allow it. Technoblade is moving before anyone says anything at all.

"Infighting right now is *stupid*," he snarls as he beats his palm into one of the desks within the hellicarrier, a tearing noise accompanying it as his nails dig into the metal and *rip*. There's something satisfying about his ability to destroy that, even if it's too simple, and it does not bleed. Something cathartic enough that he can focus on the world around him long enough to show them all his *rage* — and their own stupidity as well. "Not while— not while we've got two people's lives on the line — that we *know of* and when only the Gods know however many *more!* Stark— get your head out of your *ass*."

He stalks forward until he's standing there just above Tony. The suit gives him height, but Technoblade is more than experienced in intimidating *everything*. "You're not the only person worried for Peter right now, but to be honest? I don't give a damn. I give a damn about *saving my friend*— who, if you hadn't noticed, has been attacked and— and *taken* by some sort of parasitic *freak!*"

Chest heaving, inches from Stark's face, Technoblade stares into Iron Man's eyes and finds *hate*. For a single moment, he feels it too.

Then a hand presses up against his chest. Steve. He pushes Tony away, though makes no move to force Techno to change his stance, as he places himself between them. There is no fear in his eyes now, as he faces the Blood God Himself, with his sword drawn and his target locked.

"Stand down, Technoblade," says Steve Rogers, as the man in question finds that he has raised his blade to the sky and is poised to begin a fight. There's nothing but a firm determination in the Captain's voice. For a single second, Technoblade considers how close they are — and how easy it would be to slide his blade just a few inches further.

Then it returns to him. Who he is facing. Where he is. *Who* he is. He can feel his beating heart start to settle, the blood in his veins no longer screaming but simply wailing for his

attention.

And Tony doesn't look afraid, as he looks at Technoblade. The worst part is, that he doesn't even look particularly *angry*. He looks exhausted, as if their conversation has aged him past his years, the sallowness of his skin clear as day as the fading rays of daylight outside slip past the dips in his skin. There is no hate or anger or fear in his eyes when he looks at the man who had just threatened his life.

Technoblade takes an uncertain step back. He swallows, though it makes his throat ache, and he sheathes his sword, eyes darting from the blade to Tony and then back to his own hand.

"For what it's worth," Steve says carefully, "We're all afraid."

For a moment he wants to fight that. It feels like an accusation, rather than a truth. But his hand tightens on his sword, and he looks out the window, eyes glazing over, and *he thinks*. He thinks of the way his heart pounds, and of the scent of fresh blood upon his hands, and the way he desperately, beyond everything, wants to get to his friend. Beyond the screaming calls for blood in his mind. Beyond the fight in his veins and heart, pumping throughout every inch of his matter. Beyond it all—

"I just want him to be *ok*," he croaks out. His voice is small. Perilously so, every new word threatening to send him spiraling. "Just— *Gods*. We're both so *tired*."

No one moves to comfort him. For that, he is grateful. There's nothing they could possibly say.

The great windows of their vehicle open after minutes of silence. Technoblade occupies himself with pacing frantically back and forth, trying to devise a plan, to figure out what he's going to do. Because it *is* going to be him that destroys the parasite. It's going to be him who saves Phil, because there's no other choice. That's his friend. His partner. His one and only on earth and probably beyond, too, if their jump from their birthplace to here is any indication.

He can't help but feel a sense of finality in that thought. They're here, now. They will probably never be back home, will they? Not in this life. Technoblade doesn't believe in any real afterlife - it's a little hard to when you have concrete proof of what comes after. But he hopes that wherever, whenever, he ends up next, it's with Phil. (And if he's lucky, maybe it will be here.)

The mess below is terrible. It's not something Philza would ever willingly bring upon the world. Leveled buildings, corpses strewn about. The injured wail, some of their broken bodies pulsing with that same awful red parasite that clings to his friend. His friend who is suddenly nowhere to be seen, out of sight.

No one says anything as they wait for Stark to bring up the radar results. Phil is somewhere, and wherever he is, Technoblade will-

The ship rocks.

Heavy turbulence. The sound of something heavy cutting into the metal. A shout of: “*It’s on the ship!*” Technoblade thinks, a little hysterically, that Phil doesn’t need to land on the ship — he could always just fly around it. Fly circles around a jet, probably, but now isn’t the time.

Because another slam breaks through the air, this time accompanied by a spluttering of the engine. Stark lets out a sharp gasp — the whole thing is falling apart, now, as he grabs Natasha and Clint by the waist, as Steve rips the door to the ship off its hinges. The hull is screaming wildly, and Steve jumps, and Tony flies out, and Technoblade can tell that they expect him to jump as well. It occurs to him that whatever it is he’s fighting, he’d better start now.

He isn’t far from the ground, and he could certainly leap out, attack from a distance. But a bright red arm has pierced through the back of the ship, a violent growl rising from its owner as blood-red tendrils spool from their skin. It violently latches onto the ship, clearly knowing that he will not leave. He will stand his ground and *fight*.

And Technoblade does.

He rushes forward and latches onto the arm, keratin-coated fingertips digging into the symbiote’s material as if it’s only water. He hits skin — and he keeps going, even as the hand searches for him, as he finds his arm and teeth sink into his skin.

He doesn’t budge. No, Technoblade takes a step backward, gritting his teeth as the thing starts to crawl up his arm. He can see, rather than hear, bastardized and fleshy wings slamming against the ship, the hole where the arm comes from having widened. Someone is screaming. His own voice is roaring, his back muscles straining, tail thrashing wildly as he holds on for Phil’s goddamn *life*.

Then: the whine of a repulsor. The ship jerking to the side, and Technoblade is thrown against a wall as it lands, heavily, on a nearby building. Pain erupts in his side and yet he doesn’t let go. He doesn’t think he can, with little white teeth latched onto his arm, like tumors in nature, rippling up from Phil’s arm. Because it is Phil’s arm — even though it has too many fingers, and an eye, and it ripples, and it is bright red and far too thick to be an arm.

The thing screams. Technoblade doesn’t. No, he’s yanking his arm away, blood spiraling through the fine hair that grows from his skin. The door to the ship has been hopelessly mangled in its destruction, and he has no problem exiting.

The cameras did not do Philza justice.

Philza can’t even be called Philza anymore, not reasonably. He’s well over 10 feet tall, his body twisted in all sorts of directions that it shouldn’t be. And his *wings*— they’re reduced to skeletons, stripped of feathers. Or, perhaps even worse, they’re simply being clung to by the parasitic being that eats away at him now. Techno can see the blaze of some far-off flame through the sinews of the wings. They halo the parasite’s head, with gaping teeth that ring what should be eyes.

He's light and quick on his feet. "*Get the survivors!*" He roars out to the others, wherever they are. His commlink is failing, playing nothing but static. Technoblade tears it out, listening to the whine fade.

And then, Carnage rushes forward on too many legs, and screams.

Technoblade slashes wildly with his sword. It swings forward— catching on a large glob of red residue hanging off of what looks like a melted clump of human fingers. It drops to the ground, then shrivels, then expands, leaping at him like worms. He whirls on his heel, slamming the bridge of his sword into a wall. It *clangs* noisily and the red crawling up the hilt drops, the symbiote behind him screaming in anger. It's then that he remembers— sound and fire. The two things that count as the awful creature's weaknesses.

Technoblade doesn't often use fire aspect weapons, and his rocket launcher is as broken as it was the day he arrived on earth and it got *smashed*. But he is as violent as everyone likes to imply he is, despite Phil liking to argue he's also got a soft side. His blade severs the air, and through it, it sinks, quickly replaced in his hand by something far older.

It's a diamond sword. He's never had the chance to convert it to netherite, and he doesn't have the time to start now. But it's stacked — mending, fire aspect, sharpness, looting. Digging his heels into the ground, he doesn't move away from the advancing enemy. He can hear someone in the background — Natasha, he thinks, *screaming* at him to move. It's the most emotional he's ever heard her.

But at the last moment, the sword ignites. The parasite *screams* as it sinks into its arm, going halfway through the red substance before it starts to sizzle. Technoblade pushes further, shoulders rippling from the effort, as the thing tries to yank itself away. It is then that he realizes he's hit something hard. *Bone*.

He yanks the sword back out in an instant, an uncertain noise uttered from his lips as he stumbles backward. His indecision costs him — a tendril strikes out and slams into his side, sending him flying into the building next to him. His shoulders *cracks*, something bending the wrong direction within him. Technoblade would shout, but the wind is knocked out of him, as he's plucked up off the ground by the neck, a bright red arm wrapping around him and starting to *squeeze*.

Struggling, he starts to kick his legs out beneath him, feeling his boots at first scuff the ground and then lift off entirely. He's choking, all the air flooding from his lungs with a broken wheeze. The sword spasms between his fingers— and despite it being within easy reach, he can't strike out. Because when he *had*, his blade had sunk past the parasite. Sunk through skin. Sunk into *bone*. *Philza's bone*.

But because Technoblade isn't an idiot, he doesn't falter for long enough for his neck to snap. He can feel his collarbones creaking under the enormous weight of the tendrils wrapped all around him, slowly advancing up towards his mouth, his nose, his eyes. He throws his head back, then down, sinking his teeth into the thing. It must startle it, because a moment later, he's slipping.

That's his chance. It doesn't even pause long enough to drop him, the grip already tightening again. But suddenly, Technoblade is swinging his sword up in a massive arc and slamming it *clear* through the monster's arm.

It screams. This time, Philza does too. He can hear it — knows he'll hear it in his dreams, too, till he dies. Technoblade lets out a guttural noise of his own as he rushes forward, ignoring the fact that there's a perfectly formed human arm now lying free on the ground. The symbiote is already regenerating, and he's not sure whether that means Philza is too. He *hopes*. Hopes even though it's going to make this all the harder.

There's a large explosion behind him that has left a crater of smoke and fire. Technoblade knows it's a long shot — slash, cut, thrust, he watches the thing regenerate in *seconds* — but he has no option but to try. He dodges a tendril as it forms a blade and moves to cut through his side— instead feeling it slice a deep gash into his upper arm.

Around him, it's as if all the others have died. He can't even bring himself to care about the eerie quiet, the desperate pounding of his own heartbeat the only thing he can hear. The only thing in his vision, though, is the blade in his hands, already bloody and chipped from there it had struck the ground after cleaving through Philza's arm.

He manages to rush forward and summon his shield before the thing can gut him. It smashes under the pressure in seconds— but he slides through its legs and starts *sprinting*, leaping over ruined cars and shattered streets. There are bodies around, he realizes, as he only narrowly misses stepping on them. They are just as brutalized as the streets beneath them.

Technoblade is not a vigilante or a hero. He is not Matt Murdock or Peter Parker or Natasha Romanoff or even Pepper Potts, in her own odd way of being heroic. He is a cruel, death-driven being with no regard for anything but himself, but Philza, but the screaming in his veins.

But even so, as he dances through the rubble, never once turning to look or attack the symbiote behind him, he can't help but *hate* the thing that has taken over Phil, for more reasons than one. He hates it for what it has done to him. He hates it for what it has done to Phil. He even hates it for what it has done to these poor bastards beneath him, bloodied and burnt and twisted and unrecognizable.

Technoblade is going to kill it.

All the noises in the world are silent. All the noises in the world have been reduced to a singular point of origin — *screaming, wailing, weeping*, tiny nails and teeth digging into the veins under his skin. They're screaming at him — *dodge left, shoot right, cut— cut— cut—* — the voices are, directing him to act. They have never screamed louder, he thinks, as he stumbles under their weight.

Either way, his limbs act against him and that stumble becomes a jump as he lurches over another overturned car. His body belongs to him but it equally belongs to Blood — both his and otherwise.

It's a bit like the droning of bees as they swarm. Bees on a rotting carcass, drawn by the scent of the pollen that grows around the dead. Technoblade turns to face the thing once again.

There is hardly a few inches between them. He swings — and it screams as fire arcs into its chest, burning through the red, until it blisters, it bubbles horribly, a black liquid oozing from it. The heat on his back is burning through his skin and clothes where his armor does not reach. His hair is searing on his neck. Technoblade feels blisters erupt on his back. He grits his teeth.

He doesn't know what happens, to make him leap at it. His arms draw back. Horror fills him as he realizes his limbs are no longer his own. The sword falls. It screams as the blade sinks into its chest, right through to where Technoblade's capable arms know it can find Philza's heart.

Techno is one of the only people in any world given the privilege of knowing just where to find Philza's heart. He knows how it flutters when you hold it, how fragile every inch of it is when it really comes down to it. And that knowledge has not been given lightly— for Phil is the only one in turn who knows where Technoblade's own heart lies.

It lies with Phil, he thinks, as the creature *falls*.

Red shoots from its awful chest. It's falling into the flame. Technoblade is too close— he's going to be burnt. He can see the symbiote starting to slink away from the body beneath it. There's fire, engulfing them both. Flame licking up his sides. It heats his armor, trapping him in a metal casing of flame, what was once meant to protect him now destroying him from the outside in.

That's inconsequential, though, as his hands claw through the rubble, as Technoblade *crawls*. Desperately, watching as the hilt of his sword sinks further down, inching deeper into the skin of the man beneath the parasite. The red is still slinking away. He can see Philza beneath it all, now. Can see his skin bubble, blister, turning from bloody red to a terrible, awful black.

He can hear the screaming. He knows he'll never forget it.

But then, someone is grabbing the back of Technoblade's armor, tugging him off the ground, out of the flame. He *wails*, not even moving to attack his own attacker, instead only tugging himself from their grasp to try and get to Phil. His arms are red and blistered, blood running down every inch of his skin, and he can no longer differentiate between reality and hallucination. But he struggles viciously, yanking on the hand, whirling around when it doesn't give, raising an axe that suddenly finds itself in his hand—

It slams into something and *shatters*.

The netherite *breaks*. The impact shatters Technoblade's own skin, he thinks. There's something blurry and red and blue and white and circular extended outward where he'd just aimed. A shout. Someone is calling for him.

With the last ounce of his strength, Technoblade slams his skull into the ground and lets darkness consume him.

Chapter End Notes

yessymbiote'sregeneratetheirhosts nophilzaisnotdead notechnobladeisnotdead
yesthenextchapterwillhavecomfort mydearestapologies

End Notes

Tell me what you think! I love love love receiving comments, no matter how long or short. Kudos are always wonderful as well! all support is incredibly encouraging

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